

THE
AUTHORITY OF TRADITION

IN

MATTERS OF RELIGION.

BY THE

REV. GEORGE HOLDEN, M. A.

Unde est ista traditio? Utrumne de Dominica et Evangelica Auctoritate descendens, an de Apostolorum mandatis atque epistolis veniens? Ea enim facienda esse quæ scripta sunt Deus testatur.—
CYPRIAN, Epist. lxxiv.

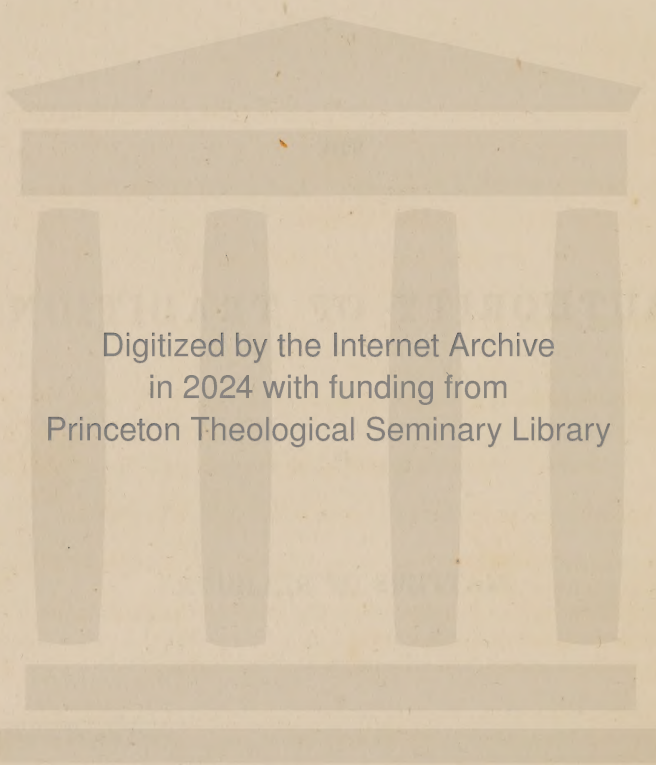
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PREFACE.

THE only tradition, respecting which any controversy need be raised, relates to the doctrines received by the early Christians as the genuine doctrines of the Gospel. These formed the public creed, the system of religious faith and practice which was professed and handed down in the primitive churches, and which is denominated "primitive tradition," as distinguished from the doctrine written in the Bible; and the question at issue is, What authority is due to it in matters of religion?

Now the answer to this important inquiry chiefly depends upon the fact of apostolicity; that is, whether the primitive doctrinal system can be shown to be precisely the same that was delivered by Christ and his Apostles; and the result of the Author's researches is,

1. That there is not evidence to prove the creed, or traditive doctrine of the primitive churches to be APOSTOLICAL and DIVINE; and, therefore, it is not to be *venerated with equal piety and reverence as the written word of God*; nor to be received as *the authoritative test* of the true meaning of the sacred writings.

2. That primitive tradition, not being apostolical and divine, must consequently be regarded as merely HUMAN TESTIMONY; yet, as such, forms a most valuable help to, and confirmation of, the right interpretation of the Scrip-

tures; for which reason, in all questions of faith, a reverent attention ought to be paid to its voice.

3. That although primitive tradition constitutes only *a collateral proof*, not *the standard*, of Scripture doctrine; and although no absolute judge in controversies of faith exists, Providence has vouchsafed SUFFICIENT GUIDES to enable all persons to acquire a saving knowledge of revealed truth; namely, THE LIGHT OF REASON—THE TEACHING OF THE CHURCH—and THE ILLUMINATION OF THE SPIRIT.

4. That this is the only view of tradition compatible at once with the sovereign authority of the Scriptures, the constitution and privileges of the Catholic Church, and the unalienable right of private judgment.

5. That it is in perfect accordance with the principles and doctrines of the Church of England.

In the course of the investigation, which has led to these results, materials accumulated to such an extent as might easily have been expanded into a bulky volume; but brevity was the Author's aim; and if the pursuit of it has sometimes impeded the full development of his reasoning, it may derive light from keeping in view the above conclusions, to which he was led by the arguments adduced in the ensuing treatise.

It may be proper to observe, that the terms "ultra-protestantism," and "via media," which have been so often applied, or misapplied, in the recent controversy, have been studiously avoided, from a conviction of the inutility, to say the least, of adopting terms to which a different meaning is annexed, according to the different views of the parties who use them.

THE

AUTHORITY OF TRADITION.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS.

I. SCARCELY any subject in controversial theology is of more importance than Tradition. The student meets with a constant appeal to it, whether the inquiry be directed to the consideration of the Church and its ministry, or to the essential doctrines of Christianity, or to the true exposition of the sacred Scriptures. Yet it is a subject not only intricate in itself, but so involved in obscurity, in consequence of the diversified notions and partial views of controversialists, that amid the conflict of opposing statements its true character is very apt to elude the most attentive research.

The term "tradition," in its general acceptance, means either the *act of delivering down*, or the *thing delivered down*. In the former, which is probably its primary signification, it is applied to the mode of communication, or the vehicle by which any doctrine or fact is transmitted, whether by writing, by word of mouth, or by commemorative monuments. In the latter it admits of various applications, though still retaining its general sense; as, for instance, *First*, to all the doctrines delivered by Christ and

the Apostles, whether orally or by writing, and so includes the sacred Scriptures. *Secondly*, to the testimony afforded by successive witnesses to any fact. *Thirdly*, to the doctrines received by the Church, and handed down by succession through some other medium than the Scriptures, and so is equivalent to the public creed, the system of religious faith and practice, the professed belief of the Church, as distinguished from the doctrine written in the Bible.

Whether these doctrines may be collected from Scripture, or may be proved thereby, or whether they were originally delivered by Christ and his Apostles, is another matter: it is the fact of their being the public creed and received doctrine of the Church transmissively, that constitutes their distinctive character as tradition: for whatever is held and handed down by the Church as a part of the Christian religion, whether in accordance with the inspired writers or not, is tradition.

Neither does the mode of transmission make any difference; for tradition, as implying doctrines, may obviously be either written or unwritten. It may also be distributed into separate divisions, differently designated. Thus frequent mention is made of "ecclesiastical," "interpretive," and "doctrinal" traditions; meaning by the first, matters relating to rites and ceremonies; by the second, the sense in which the Scriptures were understood by the Church; and by the third, articles of faith. Those termed "ecclesiastical," as being certain customs and ceremonies, for which a divine warrant is not pretended, have occasioned but little dispute, and may well be put out of consideration. But those termed "interpretive," and "doctrinal," constitute together that body of doctrines relating both to faith and practice, which has been held and transmitted by the Church, and which is denominated Tradition. This is the only tradition forming the subject of religious controversy.

II. Respecting the degree of authority due to it in matters of religion, four different opinions have met with zealous advocates.

1. The *first* is that of the Romanists, whose rule of faith is the whole Word of God, or, in other terms, both Scripture and tradition; which tradition they believe consists of doctrines partly contained in the Scripture, and partly interpretive of it, orally delivered by Christ or his Apostles and uninterruptedly transmitted by the Church in their original purity; and therefore to be received and venerated with equal piety and reverence as the written Word of God. And they further believe that the Catholic Church is constituted by Jesus Christ, a living and infallible guide both for determining what books are canonical, and what traditions are genuine, and also for propounding their true sense. Tradition thus pointed out and interpreted by an unerring teacher must clearly be regarded both as independent of Scripture, and of equal authority with it, as proceeding from the same divine source, though transmitted by a different channel.

2. The *second* opinion is that of some learned Protestants, who do not regard tradition as an independent source of divine truth, but as the only guide to it. In this light it has been viewed by some eminent theologians from the era of the Reformation. Among our older divines no one has supported this principle more unreservedly than Thorn-dike, who, in various works of great erudition, contends that we are to examine all matters of faith by the sense of the Catholic Church; "that original catholic tradition is to be supposed for unquestionable truth in deciding what is questionable concerning the truth of Scripture," and so forms "the boundary to all interpretation of Scripture."* In 1718 Dr. Brett published an able work to prove "tradition necessary to explain and interpret Scripture." But it is unnecessary to accumulate more consen-

* De Rat. et Jure finiendi Controv. Ecclesiæ: cap. xxvii. et al.; Epilogue to the Tragedy of the Church of England, lib. ii.; Just Weights and Measures, chap. vi.

tient opinions; as they may be found cited at large in the works mentioned below.*

The same principle has recently been defended with superior learning and ability. Professor Keble, in his "Visitation Sermon," advocates tradition, "as parallel to Scripture, not as derived from it; and consequently as fixing the interpretation of disputed texts, not simply by the judgment of the Church, but by the authority of that Holy Spirit which inspired the oral teaching itself, of which such tradition is the record; (p. 23;) and he declares that one great subject on which most of us are unconsciously indebted to the ancient Catholic tradition, is the *interpretation of Scripture*, especially those parts of it which less obviously relate to the mysteries of the Gospel. Catholic tradition bears upon Scripture interpretation not only indirectly, by supplying certain great landmarks of apostolical doctrine, conformably to which the written statements are all to be interpreted, but also in numerous cases, directly; setting the Church's seal, as it were, upon one among many possible expositions of particular passages." (P. 35.) Mr. Newman, in his "Lectures on the Prophetical Office of the Church," remarks: "The primitive Church has authority as the legitimate expositor of Christ's meaning; she acts not from her own discretion, but from Christ and his Apostles." (P. 95.) "The rule of faith, which is now commonly taken to mean the Bible by itself, would seem, in the judgment of the English church, properly to belong to the Bible and Catholic tradition taken together. These two together make up a joint rule: Scripture is interpreted by tradition, tradition verified by Scripture; tradition gives form to the doctrine, Scripture gives life; tradition teaches, Scripture proves." (P. 327.) In a similar way the author of the 78th No. of the Oxford Tracts declares, that "Catholic tradition teaches revealed truth, Scripture

* Scrivener, *Apologia pro Patribus*, cap. viii. ix.; Bp. Jebb, *Append. to Sermons*; Churton, *Visitation Sermon in 1836*, *Append. A.*; *Oxford Tracts*, No. 78; Russell, *Judgment of the Anglican Church*.

proves it; Scripture is the document of faith, tradition the witness of it: the true creed is the Catholic interpretation of Scripture, or Scripturally proved tradition." (P. 2.) Dr. Hook, in his "Five Sermons preached before the University of Oxford," says: "In forming our analogy of faith, let us, when duly prepared by prayer, compare Scripture with Scripture; let us attend to the criticism of the Bible; let us attend to its grammatical interpretation; but let us place all under the supervision of Catholic tradition."* (P. 117.)

It would be as senseless as wicked to hold forth any thing as THE TEST of orthodox interpretation, which is merely human and fallible. The only rational ground for investing it with such an authority, is the belief that it is the faithful record of the apostolical preaching. Accordingly, a sacred character is ascribed to tradition by the advocates of this *second* opinion, all of whom regard the doctrine of the universal Church as an unerring and irrefragable guide in controversies of faith. In the 71st No. of the "Oxford Tracts," it is described as "another great gift equally from God" with the Bible; (p. 8;) as affording a certainty in regard to the high theological doctrines, "which supersedes the necessity of arguing from Scripture against those who oppose them." (P. 28.) Mr. Newman, in his "Lectures," (p. 62,) says: "Whatever doctrine the primitive ages unanimously attest, whether by consent of fathers, or by councils, or by the events of history, or by controversies, or in whatever way, whatever may fairly and reasonably be considered to be the universal belief of those ages, is to be received as coming from the Apostles." So Bp. Jebb: "As the universal consent of all men, in all ages, is allowed to be the voice of nature, so, the una-

* The same principle is maintained by Mr. Faber in his learned works on "Romanism," "Trinitarianism," and "Calvinism;" by Mr. Irons in his "Lectures on the Holy Catholic Church;" by Bp. Jebb, Mr. Churton, and Mr. Dodsworth in their "Sermons;" by Mr. Russell, in his "Judgment of the Anglican Church;" and many others.

nimous concurrence of councils, churches, bishops, and fathers, ought to be received as the voice of the Gospel." (Pastoral Instructions, p. 21.)

Though the advocates of this theory frequently state it in general terms, they for the most part admit its application only within certain limits. They do not define its exact boundaries, yet seldom extend it beyond the fundamental articles of faith.

They, likewise, make large professions in favour of the paramount authority of the Scriptures. They do not hesitate to declare the authority of tradition to be subordinate to that of the Bible, and to profess that they revere pious antiquity in a secondary degree to the word of God, which they believe is the means of proof, the standard of appeal, the umpire and test between truth and falsehood. According to them, tradition is not by itself, and without Scripture warrant, the foundation of doctrines; not a rule distinct and co-ordinate, but subordinate and ministrative. Hence, they sometimes represent Scripture to be the Rule of Faith, as being the source and standard of sacred truth; and, sometimes, Scripture and Catholic Tradition to be the joint rule, because they believe the sense of the written word on important points is to be received, as interpreted by the universal Church. Though professing to regard holy Scripture as the record and depository of all saving truth, they all agree in this, that, to a certain extent, its interpretation is to be determined by the universal consent of Christian antiquity; which they consider as the standard by which we are to judge of the orthodoxy and purity of our creed.

Again, they limit the authority of tradition to the primitive ages. As to the exact period, they are not agreed; some extending it little beyond the close of the second century; some to the Nicene council; some to the four first general councils; and others still further. The different opinions are enumerated by Mr. Newman, in his eighth "Lecture;" but all concur in this, that tradition continued

to flow pure and genuine for a certain period, after which it contracted many impurities and defilements in its course.

A theory thus modified cannot, its advocates assert, be fairly accused of Romanism, of which it is an essential article to receive tradition as entirely co-equal with Scripture, and to believe its continuous purity in all ages to the present time.

3. The *third* opinion is, that of those who look upon tradition, as useful, but not, strictly speaking, authoritative. Far from contemning the voice of Christian antiquity, they listen to it with reverential respect. In all matters of theological controversy, they think it entitled to be heard, but they do not bow to it with implicit submission; they appeal to it in Biblical interpretation, but only as one among many other witnesses to the truth; and they deem it only as a valuable help, not as the sole guide in exposition; as one mode among many others of trying the truth or falsehood of any doctrine, and, therefore, not to be looked upon as the criterion for testing the truths deduced from the Bible.

4. The *fourth* opinion is received by a large body of Protestants, who hold it as a fundamental principle, that the obscure parts of Scripture can only be explained by others, which are more clear, and thus, consequently, the true interpretation is to be exclusively derived from Scripture itself, without any regard to the voice of Christian antiquity.

It is, sometimes, difficult to decide in which class certain writers should be placed. Some are either so indistinct in their notions, or so incautious in their expressions, as to render it nearly impossible to discover what were their actual views respecting the authority of tradition. But however undefined the notions or language of particular writers, the *four* opinions now enumerated are clearly distinct, separated by a plainly distinguishable line.

III. To decide between contending parties is a vain attempt, without some common ground to rest upon, some first principles from which we may set out; and, fortunately, such are not wanting in this case; for, in the *first* place, all are agreed, that as the Bible is the word of God, whatever it teaches must be infallible truth. The Roman Catholic system does not in the least exclude the Scriptures; and its staunchest supporters scruple not to affirm, that all doctrines absolutely essential are contained with more or less clearness in the sacred writings.*

Secondly, whatever the Apostles enjoined, either by word of mouth or by writing; and whether it has been preserved in the Scriptures, or in some other way, is equally divine. The mode of transmission is of no importance; and if any tradition can be proved to have been derived from Christ or the Apostles, by whatever channel it may be conveyed, all parties are willing to receive it with the same sentiments of piety and affection as the written word. The dispute about tradition does not refer to the manner of conveyance, but to its authenticity; and it is because it cannot be satisfactorily authenticated, that it is rejected as the arbiter of the written verities of religion. In this, Usher, Wake, Hooker, Bramhall, Patrick, Stillingfleet, Taylor, and even Chillingworth, with all the standard divines, accord with one voice.

Thirdly, there is no difference of opinion as to the apostolical origin of the early creed. The Apostles were the first preachers of Christianity, and the first founders of the churches, which, consequently, received their first creed from these inspired teachers. The dispute regards its *continued purity*—whether evidence can be produced to show that it has been preserved in its integrity, or has been corrupted in its progress.

* "The catholic system," says Dr. Wiseman, "does not in the least exclude the Scriptures: it admits them in their fullest authority; it allows, that, whatever is therein revealed is necessarily true: it holds that the foundation, or root, of all doctrines is to be virtually discovered in them." Lectures, vol. i. p. 305. See Bellarmine, De Verbo Dei, lib. iv. cap. ii.

Fourthly, neither is there any dispute whether the sacred writings contributed to the formation of the primitive creed. The Christian faith was first promulgated by the oral teaching of the Apostles; but as soon as their writings were published to the world, both, as emanating from the same source, would become blended in one stream, conveying to all who drank of it the pure waters of life. Of this united stream, the early believers would doubtless avail themselves; the question at least is not, whether their creed may have been built upon the oral teaching, or upon the Scriptures, or partly upon both; but, whether their creed, as distinguished from the Scriptures, is to be regarded as unquestionably exhibiting the apostolical doctrine.*

IV. Applying these principles to the subject before us, we find one great question involved in the controversy, namely, whether tradition is APOSTOLICAL and DIVINE. Bel-larmine and others of his communion, distinguish between these terms, applying the former to such traditions as are supposed to have come from the Apostles, and the latter to those from our Lord; but as an equal authority is ascribed to both, it is a distinction of no importance in the present inquiry. The whole controversy turns upon this, whether any doctrine, or body of doctrines, can be traced up to the same inspired source as the Scriptures. If the traditional creed of the Church, so far as it is known to us, can be *proved* to be identically the same as that which was preached by Christ and the Apostles, it ought to be received with profound veneration, and adopted as the test of the orthodoxy of our faith. But if it cannot, then it is not

* Mr. Keble observes, "Tradition and Scripture were at first two streams flowing down from the mountain of God, but their waters presently became blended; and it were but a vain and unprofitable inquiry, to call upon every one who drinks of them to say, how much of the healing draught came from one source, and how much from the other." Serm. on Trad. Append. p. 73, *third edition*. Yet, in other places, he represents tradition as "a body of truth and duty, totally distinct from the Scriptures, and independent of them," p. 22, "as parallel to Scripture, not as derived from it," p. 23, comp. p. 26, 27.

to be revered as *divine*, however it may be respected as *human* testimony.

Again, the question of apostolicity, that is, whether the doctrines professed and handed down in the Church are such precisely as were delivered by the inspired authors of our religion, is of principal importance as regards the contending parties. Those who adopt the second of the opinions above stated (p. 4,) agree with Romanists, in receiving the traditionary system of faith as apostolical, though they differ from them as to its extent. Hence, if it can be shown that there is not satisfactory evidence of its apostolicity, the theories both of Romish and Protestant traditionists must be abandoned; and we must, as a matter of course, adopt one or other of the two last-named opinions, which agree in regarding primitive tradition as only *human* evidence, though they differ as to the degree of authority due to it.

Now, apostolicity cannot be established by attempting to show the conformity of the creed with the sacred writings. It is common with theologians to maintain this or that church to be apostolical, because its articles of faith and discipline are scriptural; but such a mode of argument, besides supposing a previous knowledge of the Scripture doctrines, constitutes no proof of apostolical authority. Identity of doctrine does not infer identity of authority; as the preaching of Polycarp may have been conformable to that of St. John, though the latter alone is inspired. The claim of apostolical authority, therefore, can only be established by clear and distinct evidence over and above a conformity with Scripture.

Neither can such claim rest, as some imagine, upon mere strong probability, such as is sufficient for a wise man's guidance in the conduct of life. Absolute demonstration, indeed, is not here attainable; but full and satisfactory *moral* evidence is required. Upon such evidence we give our consent to Scripture, and to the truths deduced from it; and tradition can only be traced up to Christ

and his Apostles, by the same historical testimony, and the same mode of reasoning, as serves to establish the genuineness and canonical authority of the Scriptures themselves. Less than this may suffice to show its *utility*, but cannot prove its *apostolicity*; and, failing in this, tradition becomes mere *human* authority, valuable it may be, but not entitled to the reverence justly due to whatever is proved to be apostolical.

As the apostolicity of tradition must be proved, if proved at all, by historical testimony, analogous to that by which any remote fact is established, the evidence of Scripture is admissible, so far as it can be brought to bear upon it. But it must chiefly be sought in other sources; as the decrees of councils, the works of the fathers, and still remaining ecclesiastical documents. These are the witnesses to the canon of Scripture which was received, to the discipline which was practised, and to the creed which was publicly enjoined, and preserved by the churches in successive ages; and it is only by collecting the evidence which they supply, and by scrutinizing the intrinsic properties of tradition, that we can be enabled to determine what regard is due to it.

In attempting this, it will be sufficient to confine the investigation within the limits of the earlier ages of Christianity; for, whatever degree of authority it may legitimately claim during that period, it cannot possibly be entitled to greater in any subsequent one. The stream of traditionary doctrine, it is reasonable to suppose, must have contracted some impurities and foulness in its progress; it never could, at least, have been purer than nearest its source: if, therefore, it should be found impossible either to discover what were the transmissive doctrines in the earliest ages of the Church, or to trace them to a divine source; or if evidence be wanting to prove their derivation, and pure transmission from Christ and the Apostles, then the apostolicity of the Church tradition must be discarded,

since its corruption at its very source must have been perpetuated, if not augmented, by length of succession.

The controversy, therefore, respecting tradition, when reduced to its proper limits, resolves itself into this simple question, IS THERE SATISFACTORY EVIDENCE TO PROVE THE APOSTOLICITY OF THE PUBLIC CREED, OR TRADITIVE DOCTRINE, PROFESSED AND DELIVERED DOWN TRANSMISSIVELY IN THE PRIMITIVE CHURCHES?

CHAPTER II.

THE HISTORICAL EVIDENCE TO THE AUTHORITY OF TRADITION.

I. THE continual preservation of the faith in its genuineness and purity, is represented as resulting from the constitution of the Christian Church, which was established by Christ to be a visible society, for the custody of true religion, and for the instruction of all nations in it by means of a perpetual succession of governors and pastors, to whom he promised his abiding presence and assistance in the performance of their holy office. The Church thus constituted, it is urged, is the constant and faithful depository of revealed truth, and what she teaches must, by necessary consequence, be infallibly true. From this position the Romanist leaps to the conclusion, that the Roman Catholic church is invested with the attribute of inerrancy, whereby she is enabled to declare with infallible authority, what particular book is the word of God, to explain its meaning, and to teach all mysteries and duties necessary to salvation; while, on the other hand, some Protestants infer from it that tradition, being the doctrine of the Church in the primitive and purest ages, must faith-

fully exhibit, in its grand outlines, the preaching of the Apostles.

The position whence these inferences are drawn, is readily conceded. The Church is, by Divine promise, indefectible and secure from error in essential points; whatever, therefore, she propounds as an article of faith, must be acknowledged to be conformable to the mind of Christ.* But though an exemption from error in fundamentals belongs to the true Catholic Church, from its very nature and constitution, this character does not attach to any particular church: the divine promises are made to the universal Church, not to any particular part of it. When we say, "that there shall be a church always, somewhere or other, unerring in fundamentals, our meaning is but this, that there shall be always a Church, to the very being whereof it is repugnant that it should err in fundamentals; for if it should do so, it would want the very essence of a Church, and, therefore, cease to be a Church. But we never annex this privilege to any one Church, of any one denomination, as the Greek or the Roman church; which, if we had done, and set up some settled certain society of Christians, distinguishable from all others, by adhering to such a bishop for our guide in fundamentals; then, indeed, and then only, might you with some colour, though not with certainty, have concluded that we could not in wisdom forsake this church in any point, for fear of forsaking it in a necessary point. But now that we say not this of any one determinate church, which alone can perform the office of guide or director, but indefinitely of the Church, meaning no more but this—that there shall be always, in some place or other, some church that errs not in fundamentals."† It is therefore requisite to ascertain whether the traditions which have come down to us embody the doctrines of the universal Church, or only of some particular

* See my *Vindication of Church Establishments*, p. ii.

† *Religion of Protestants*, chap. iii. § 55. See Church Article XIX.

churches; since, if they are only the judgment of the latter, they have no title to be regarded as infallible truth.

This reasoning, it is true, supposes not only that particular churches may err, but that many have erred, even extensively. But is it credible that so general a defection from the truth has taken place in the Christian fold? Is it to be believed that the eternal Son of God would submit to the infirmities of human nature, and to the pains of an agonizing death, to establish a religion, and then suffer it to be contaminated with falsehood on essential points? Is it not almost impious to imagine that, after so many magnificent promises, He would abandon his church, and leave it to be polluted by error and crime—by idolatry and corruption? But eloquent as is the declamation lavished on this topic, especially by Roman Catholic writers,* the fact cannot in reason be denied or evaded. The Christian Church is, and has been long divided into countless discordant sects and parties, many of whom must necessarily be apostates from the genuine faith.

Staggered at a fact, at first sight opposed to the declared perpetuity of the Church of Christ, some suppose that the solemn promises made to it of grace and guidance, have been mysteriously frustrated; that these promises were suspended, more or less, upon the condition of unity, which condition she has for many centuries actually broken; and that, consequently, by her misconduct, she has forfeited in a measure her original privileges. Mr. Newman thence infers, "if this view of the subject be in the main correct, it would follow that the ancient church will be our model in all matters of doctrine, till it broke up into portions, and for Catholic agreement substituted peculiar and local opinions; but that since that time the Church has possessed no fuller measure of the truth than we see it has at this day; viz., merely the fundamental truth."†

* Lingard, *Collection of Tracts*, p. 154; Wiseman, *Lectures*, vol. i. p. 112.

† *Proph. Office of the Church*, p. 241. So Professor Keble, *Sermon on Tradition*, p. 42.

That the divine promises have sometimes been suspended upon certain conditions is clear: the single instance of the Jews, is sufficient proof; but there is no "if" in the gracious promises made to the Christian Church, no qualifying expressions, no provided such and such terms be complied with; they are absolute and unconditional. The church is "the pillar and ground of the truth;" "the gates of hell *shall not* prevail against it;" "I *am* with you alway, even unto the end of the world;" "I *have* chosen you, and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should *remain*;" "when the Spirit of truth is come, he *will guide* you into all truth," "*will show* you things to come," "will bring all things to your remembrance;" the ministry is "for the perfecting of the saints," &c.

Whether the promises made to the Church were conditional or not, ecclesiastical unity has been violated; and as this violation *must* have had a commencement at some time and place, it *may* have originated with the primitive church. If it did, there will be the same difficulty in distinguishing the true Church in the primitive as in subsequent ages. Corruption being once admitted, a doubt will remain how far it extended; and so the mere fact that certain doctrines were received into the public creed of such churches, is not a proof of their being the doctrine of the holy Catholic Church.

Now scarcely any fact can be more thoroughly established, than the existence of a considerable defection from the Gospel verity at a very early period. It was foretold by the Holy Spirit, that there should arise heresies, 1 Cor. xi. 19; 2 Pet. ii. 1; strange doctrines, Col. ii. 22; Heb. xiii. 9; false teachers and false apostles, 1 Tim. i. 7; 2 Tim. iv. 3; Matt. xxiv. 24; 2 Cor. xi. 13; Gal. vi. 12; 2 Pet. ii. 1; and that a lamentable apostacy should long and extensively prevail. Many, even in the Apostles' days, had made shipwreck of their faith, and had widely departed from it, 2 Tim. i. 15; ii. 17, 18; iii. 6, et seq.; Jude 4. There were

even then many antichrists in the world, 1 John ii. 18, 19; and many false prophets had gone out into the world, 1 John iv. 1, et seq. Most of the churches mentioned in the New Testament, are represented as having fallen into error. The church of Rome was harassed with "divisions and offences contrary to sound doctrine," xvi. 17, 18. The church of the Corinthians was torn with schisms and divisions, 1 Cor. i. 11, et seq. xv. 2; and disgraced by many notorious scandals, as is evident from the whole tenor of St. Paul's epistles to them. That of Galatia had removed from him that called them into the grace of Christ, unto another gospel, i. 2, et seq. iii. 1. That of Ephesus was not long to continue "blessed with all spiritual blessings," i. 1: "for I know this," says the Apostle, "that after my departing, shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of yourselves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them," Acts xx. 29, 30. The Colossian church was infested with false teachers, who broached erroneous and pernicious opinions, ii. 8, 16, et seq.; and that of the Thessalonians had been led away by false expectations concerning the day of judgment, 1 Thess. iv. 15; 2 Thess. ii. 2. et seq. The churches of Judea, Samaria, and other countries were disturbed by Judaizing teachers, as we learn from the Acts of the Apostles; and the seven churches of Asia, spoken of in the Revelation, were unfaithful in their allegiance to Christ.

In the age succeeding the Apostles, factious divisions, unreasonable schisms, and heretical opinions were rife; and most of the churches were lacerated with intestine divisions. To the existence of such corruptions in their time, the Apostolical fathers bear ample testimony;* and

* Buddeus, *Isagoge*, p. 860. The subject of ancient heresies is discussed by Mosheim, *De Reb. Christ. ante Const.*; Itigius, *De Hæresiarchis*; Lardner, *Hist. of Heretics*; Burton, *Bampt. Lect.* for 1829. This last author says, "According to the modern acceptance of the term, there was no heretic in the time of the Apostles," p. 227. Although this assertion may well be disputed, the early Fathers used the term in a very extensive sense, and gave the name of "heretic" to some who would

the ecclesiastical writers who followed, clearly attest the prevalence of heresies. That corrupt doctrines had inundated the Church at an early period, and even from the beginning, will be questioned by no one who has any knowledge of the subject.

Why God permitted so great and so early a falling away from the religion, in the establishment of which the Divine benignity and power were so wonderfully displayed, is one of those mysterious dispensations of Providence, which human reason cannot entirely fathom. It may have been permitted and designedly recorded in order to discountenance the claim of infallibility; for if so many Christian communities had lapsed into error, even during the lifetime of the Apostles, how absurd must it be for any particular church in after-ages to plead an exemption from it! The permission of it also may have been for the purpose of exhibiting in a public manner, that faith, as well as virtue, in a state of probation, is exposed to trials, and that consequently watchfulness in guarding the truth of the Gospel, becomes an important duty: "there must be heresies among you," says the Apostle, "that they which are approved may be made manifest among you." (1 Cor. xi. 19.) Or perhaps it may have been in part intended for the corroboration of Christianity, by the fulfilment of the prophecies relating to the opposition which human depravity and satanic agency would raise against the spread of the Gospel, and especially to the withering apostacy, which, according to the predictions, was to extend so widely in the world.

It is of more moment to observe that the defection from pure Christianity, which began in the Apostolic age, and has ever since prevailed, does not invalidate the previous promises made to the Church. The essentials of the faith,

not be so called in the modern acceptance. The name, however, is of no importance to the argument enforced above: there were many erroneous doctrines, and, many false teachers, who propagated opinions not in accordance with the Gospel, even from the apostolic age downwards. Of this, Professor Burton's learned volume affords abundant proof.

which was at first delivered by the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, are still taught. Particular churches may have grossly erred; particular congregations in every church may have professed false and pernicious tenets; but the substance of sound doctrine has never been destroyed. The sacred rites, the sacramental ordinances, and the perpetuity of the ministerial succession, have continued unbroken; so that the fundamentals of the religion of Christ have remained, and, as it should seem, unimpaired. The Church has ever possessed and enjoyed her grand privilege of indefectibility, which must be deemed ample fulfilment of the divine promises. Mr. Newman acknowledges that "the promise that the word of truth should not depart out of the mouth of the church, is *satisfied* in what we see fulfilled at this day, viz. in the whole Church in all its branches having ever maintained the faith in its essential outlines; nay, it might be satisfied even in a much scantier fulfilment,—for instance, though this were all (which many think to be its highest meaning,) that there should always be *in* the Church *some* true believers."* If such be the case, how can Christ's promises be, as he contends, either frustrated or forfeited? The Church *is* indefectible; there *has* always been a body of faithful believers; and the gates of hell have *not* prevailed against her.

But though the Church was at no time free from the pernicious errors of heretics, yet these, it may be said, were not for some centuries of such an extent as materially to violate its unity. "Neither do I look upon the opposition of a handful of heretics (they are no more, being compared to the innumerable multitudes of Christians) in one or two ages, as inconsistent with universality, any more than the highest mountains are inconsistent with the roundness of the earth."† It may be difficult, or rather impossible, to estimate the comparative numbers of the or-

* Proph. Office of the Church, p. 234.

† Bramhall, Pref. to Schism guarded.

thodox and heterodox; but the latter were unquestionably numerous, and whole churches had swerved from the purity of faith, as is clear from the evidence adduced in a preceding page. The admission of heresy, however, to any extent in the primitive churches, involves us in doubt which spoke the voice of the true Church; for it cannot with certainty be affirmed, though it may be probable, that truth was on the side of the majority.

But it is asserted farther, that the heretics were always distinguished from the Catholic body, which at all times protested against and denounced them; which constantly drew a marked line between what was catholic and what was heterodox; and which never admitted any erroneous tenet, or disowned any essential doctrine, but ever preserved all fundamental and necessary truth. When, therefore, it is asked, how, amid the diversity of opinions obtaining among the ancients, are we to distinguish doctrinal truth? the advocates of tradition reply—by its conformity with the primitive Catholic Church: which is clearly a *petitio principii*; for the question is, whether these primitive churches were truly catholic; a question which cannot be decided by appealing to the general body of Christian communities; since an early defection from the Gospel truth took place, and though every one deemed itself catholic, every one by possibility might err. Their general consent to a doctrine may be, and certainly is, a strong attestation to its truth, but it is not THE test of it.

The sectarists, it is farther urged, were distinguished by another mark: "True there were sects in every country, but they bore their own refutation on their forehead, in that they were of recent origin; but all those societies in every country, which the Apostles had founded, did agree together in one; and no time short of the Apostles could be assigned with any show of argument, for the rise of their existing doctrine."* Of this test, however, it may be more properly said, that "it bears its own refutation on

* Oxford Tracts, No. 71, p. 27.

its own forehead;" for heresy, as we have seen, cannot in any just sense of the term, be said to be "of recent origin," since it had its commencement in the lifetime of the Apostles. Nor is there evidence to prove that all the societies founded by the Apostles ever "did agree together in one." But even waiving these considerations, the allegation can be of no avail; for to allege that the faith of the orthodox had its rise at "no time short of the Apostles," is a mere assumption, which, if proved, would not of itself prove also that it was the creed delivered by the inspired teachers of Christianity.*

Admitting, then, the doctrine taught by the Catholic Church of Christ to be infallibly true, we are still involved in the shades of doubt where it is to be found. The Churches of Ephesus, Antioch, Corinth, Rome, Jerusalem, &c., were only part and parcel of the Church Catholic; and as they may have erred, for a corruption of religion soon began, no article of faith is demonstrated to be divine and apostolic merely because it has been constantly recognised as such by these, or any other particular churches, since they cannot claim the privilege of inerrancy. Prove that those primitive churches, of which we have any historical records, were themselves sound branches of the Catholic Church, and their traditive doctrines as well as discipline will be embraced with all readiness of mind; but the mere fact of public reception by this or that, or by several Churches in the early ages, is no absolute proof of apostolicity.

It is not meant to deny that it carries with it a considerable weight of evidence. It amounts to something more than a presumption that the transmissive doctrine in which so many ancient churches coincided was of divine origin; and it forms a strong, it may be the strongest, ground for believing those scriptural interpretations to be right which are agreeable to primitive consent; but till such consent is proved to be the voice of the universal Church, it has

* See § iii. of this Chapter.

no just title to stamp any doctrine with the seal of consecrated truth.

II. The care which the early Christians would unquestionably take to preserve the doctrines and instructions of the Apostles, is represented as a sufficient guarantee for its success. The preaching of the first disciples of Christ would make too lasting an impression, and would be too much revered, to allow the supposition that it could either be misunderstood or forgotten by their immediate disciples; who, in like manner, would endeavour to deliver it faithfully to their followers; and so on through successive stages; and, therefore, the instructions derived from the inspired teachers would continue to be transmitted in their genuine purity, for a time at least; and probably a considerable period would elapse before any material differences would arise. Hence, as is inferred, the transmissive belief of the primitive Christians must be supposed to be in exact unison with the doctrine originally promulgated by the Apostles.

Imposing as this line of argument is, it will appear upon examination not to bear out the inference in its whole extent.

If proximity to the times of the Apostles afforded some facilities for ascertaining the truth, there were certain circumstances of the age by which they were in a great degree counterbalanced. The spirit of heathenism was then rampant, and eager to intrude, with all its pollutions, into the sanctuary;—a false philosophy, while it captivated the minds of many, served, and too often successfully, to corrupt the pure doctrine of the Gospel;—the human mind, for ages involved in the darkness of pagan idolatry, could not all at once emancipate itself from the benumbing thralldom in which it had been so long held;—the early converts to Christianity could with difficulty apprehend a religion altogether pure and spiritual;—the primitive doctors, so far as we can judge from their writings still extant, were but little accustomed to cautious inquiry and close

reasoning, and were deficient in critical judgment and hermeneutic skill; so that it is no wonder they were sometimes led away by the errors and delusions of the times, while the paucity of written documents in those early ages would prove a hinderance to their detection. All these circumstances considered, the primitive Christians cannot have derived so much advantage, as some imagine, from their proximity to the apostolic age.

Nor would the oral instruction of the Apostles be an advantage to the extent commonly supposed. What the founders of Christianity spoke was more liable to be mistaken than what they wrote; for, however luminous the reasoning, and distinct the language of the speaker, nothing is more usual than misconception on the part of the hearers. The very persons who heard the Apostles preach might easily mistake the meaning of what was uttered; and it was impossible, without a miracle, to have been at all times exempt from error and misconception. The preaching again of the contemporaries of the Apostles was equally liable to be mistaken by those who heard them; and every remove increases the probability of error; and it is impossible, as human nature is constituted, for any communication to be transmitted orally for a length of time circumstantially the same as it was originally made. How, then, can any clear and steady light of divine truth be now derived from the oral instructions of the Apostles, which they who heard it might so easily mistake, and which could not descend to a second generation without some mixture of error?

Of the truth of these remarks, ample confirmation is afforded by the example of the Israelites. Idolatry found entrance into the households of Nahor and Terah, Gen. xxxi. 30, 53; of Isaac, Esau, and Jacob, Gen. xxxi. 22; xxxv. 2. The true religion had also become corrupt among the people of Israel during their sojourn in Egypt, Josh. xxiv. 14. Such is the fact, though the Almighty vouchsafed frequent communications of his will to them,

and though they possessed superior facilities for the preservation of oral traditions.

But the early Christians, it is said, could scarcely err after the example of the Israelites; since, as the oral instructions of the Apostles were given by the guidance of the Spirit, it may be presumed that Divine Wisdom would provide for their permanent preservation, as well as for that of the Scriptures. Some supernatural assistance, it is alleged, is implied in the design of establishing a universal religion, and in Christ's announcement of its perpetuity; and, consequently, the stream of tradition would flow through many ages without any material pollution. Now there is no scriptural ground for supposing any such purpose to secure the uncontaminated transmission of Christ's religion by all persons, in all places, and in all ages. Our Lord's promise is a divine guarantee that the gates of hell shall not prevail against his religion, and the church founded by him; which implies such a superintending care as would not suffer any essential doctrine to be wholly lost, or generally corrupted; but, as has been shown in the preceding section, it affords no guarantee for the uninspired preservation of the traditive doctrines of any particular church or in any particular region.

On the other hand, the fact that the Apostles committed to writing at least the substance of the religion they preached, is strong evidence that they deemed oral instruction inadequate, and that the written word was to supply its place as the standard of religious truth. It cannot be conceived why the New Testament should have been written, except for the purpose of forming a safe and permanent rule of faith, which oral communication could not be for any length of time after the inspired teachers were no more. God commanded Moses to write the Law, which must have been intended to secure it from the doubtfulness of oral tradition; and, if verbal teaching had been a secure conveyance, no solid reason can be given why the Apostles should address written instructions to their converts. It

would have been, to say the least, a superfluous labour. It must surely have been because unwritten communications were not to be trusted, that they were instigated by the Spirit to leave in writing an imperishable code of Christ's laws.

Some writers build much upon the extraordinary gifts granted to the church, which continued, though decreasing gradually, for at least the first three centuries; and among these was the gift of discerning of spirits.* It is deemed by them to be highly improbable that the primitive churches, so favoured with miraculous powers, "should be permitted to fall into dangerous errors, or should not preserve, at least in points of importance, the true and ancient faith delivered from Christ and his Apostles."* But this reasoning rests upon a precarious basis. It is doubtful whether such gifts were really granted in the post-apostolic ages; or, if they were, whether they were accompanied with any extraordinary illumination of mind, or were any way connected with doctrinal truth; and before they can be justly pleaded as giving a sanction to the received creed of the early churches, all these doubts must be cleared up.

Admitting, then, that the primitive believers, as they had opportunities of tracing the Gospel doctrine to the fountain head, had some facilities for understanding it; and, as they held it all-important, would not as a body willingly pervert it: still they were fallible, and might mistake; they were artless, and might be influenced by prejudice; they were but men, and might be led away by designing and corrupt teachers. That they actually did err, at least to a certain extent, is placed beyond the reach of doubt by the many false and heretical doctrines which crept into the church, and corrupted the purity of the faith in the first ages. The apostolicity of their creed, cannot therefore be *proved* from the care which they took in its promotion and preservation.

* Waterland, Import. of the Doctr. of the Trinity, chap. vii. § iv.; Wake, Prel. Diss. to the Apostolical Fathers, chap. iii. § 11, sixth edit. 1833,

Though the argument entirely fails as to this point, it nevertheless lends no small sanction to the tradition of the primitive churches. The Apostles, having a Divine Agent to "bring all things to their remembrance," and to "guide them into all truth," no doubt, explained the Gospel more fully in their occasional discourses, and communicated many specific instructions to those whom they appointed to govern the church; since they would unquestionably employ effective means of imparting religious truth. Their immediate disciples, following their venerated example, would adopt the same means; and it cannot be reasonably supposed that oral instruction, which was so effective when employed by the Apostles, would in one or two descents become wholly ineffective. The creed, therefore, which they professed, may, with much appearance of reason, be believed to be conformable to what was taught by the first founders of Christianity. So long as either a presiding inspiration remained to check and control them, or the accurate recollection continued in the world, their creed would constitute a safe standard of Christian knowledge. But the care which might be taken to preserve it is not sufficient evidence to show that it continued pure and unadulterated; so that the utmost the argument amounts to, is a probability—it may be a great one—but still a probability; which, however entitled to be heard as corroborative testimony, will not prove primitive tradition to be apostolical and divine.

III. But such proof, it is urged, is supplied by historical testimony to the fact, that the traditionary belief of the Christian Church, during some centuries, remounts by an unbroken continuity to the very period of its origin. Unquestionably, if any doctrine can be traced up by a connected chain of evidence to an inspired source, it must be received as divine, according to our second position, p. 9. It is farther urged that such evidence is found in universality, antiquity, and consent of fathers, agreeably to the rule of Vincent of Lirins, "*quod ubique, quod semper,*

quod ab omnibus," &c., that which has been believed every where, always, and by all, is truly and properly Catholic, is what the Apostles preached and delivered as the doctrine of the Gospel.

This also is readily conceded: whatever doctrine has these marks and characters must clearly be the judgment of the holy Catholic church; and so in accordance with the mind of the Apostles. It is guarantied by a vast number of independent and competent witnesses. It is morally impossible, that ALL churches in the earlier ages should have diverged from the apostolical truth in things of moment, should have combined in the same error, and, as it were, conspired together to corrupt it. The unanimous consent, therefore, of ALL believers in ALL places from the beginning, is full evidence of apostolical tradition.

But here lies the difficulty: the rule, however true in principle, is, in the strict sense, of impossible application. It is not within the reach of human ability to discover what were the precise tenets held "every where, always, and by all." Nothing less than omniscience could accomplish so mighty a task. Of necessity, therefore, some abatements must be made from the universality of the rule.

If some limits must necessarily be put to its application, it may admit a doubt whether, in such case, it will constitute a proof of apostolicity. The most it can amount to is general consent; which, it has been shown, cannot be received as undeniably the voice of the Catholic church; for any thing short of universal has no absolute title to be so regarded. But still it may be sufficient evidence of most facts. We have no other ground for our belief in the genuineness and canonical authority of the sacred writings; and hence the fact, that such and such doctrines were preached by the Apostles, *may* be established by the concurring voice of antiquity, though it falls short of *universal* consent.

Yet the perplexing question returns, what is to be deemed the concurring consent of antiquity? Some are

of opinion that it is manifested in the decrees of an ecumenical council; but it must be truly such, gathered from all quarters, and acting with perfect freedom. Not that it is necessary for all bishops and pastors to be present in person, which is impossible; but it must either have delegates sent from all parts of the world, or its decrees must be accepted and acknowledged by the several provincial and national synods, to agree with the faith which they had originally received. In no other way can a council, however numerous, be truly ecumenical, really representative of the whole body of Christians; and hence, in default of this, it cannot be allowed as the testimony of the whole church; though it is a condition which has never been found to exist in any council that ever yet assembled.*

Some again limit it to the uniform consent of the reputed orthodox; or, as Bp. Jebb expresses it, to the "concurrent and consistent sentiments of the most and greatest doctors in the whole body of the church;" which coincides with the limitation admitted by Vincent of Lirins.† But, as Lardner observes, it is "a plain *petitio principii*; a mean begging of the question: that is assumed which ought to be proved: it is determined who are Catholics, or which is the Catholic faith;—whilst we are still inquiring, what is the Catholic faith? which is absurd and ridiculous."‡

The truth seems to be that the canon, with the substitution of *general* for *universal* consent, admits of various and unequal application. "The rule of Vincent is not of a mathematical or demonstrative character, but moral, and requires practical judgment and good sense to apply it. For instance, what is meant by being 'taught *always*?' does it mean in every century, or in every year, or every month? Does '*every where*' mean in every country, or in

* Hammond, of Heresie, c. v. § 5, 6, in Vol. i. of Works, folio. See my Vindication of Church Establishments, p. ii. c. iv.

† Foster, Life of Bp. Jebb, vol. ii. p. 249. "Si in ipsa vetustate, omnium vel certe pene omnium sacerdotum pariter et magistrorum definitiones sententiasque sectemur." Commonitorium, sect. iii. Comp. sect. xxxix.

‡ Credibility, chap. cxxxvi.

every diocess? And does ‘the *consent of fathers*,’ require us to produce the direct testimony of every one of them? How many fathers, how many places, how many instances, constitute a fulfilment of the test proposed? It is, then, from the nature of the case, a condition which never can be satisfied as fully as it might have been; it admits of various and unequal application in various instances; and what degree of application is enough, must be decided by the same principles which guide us in the conduct of life, which determine us in politics, or trade, or war, which lead us to accept revelation at all, for which we have but probability to show at most, nay, to believe in the existence of an intelligent Creator.”*

This view, it is true, involves the rule in a degree of uncertainty. How, and in what way, it is to be qualified, how, and in what way, it is to be applied, are matters liable to dispute; and it will consequently be applied variously, as men’s judgments vary. But this is, in some measure, the case with all moral evidence, where demonstration is not attainable. Men may differ as to the weight due to any historical testimony; yet no sound mind deems such difference a sufficient reason for rejecting it altogether. Allowing, then, that the canon, even with some restrictions, *may* be valid proof of apostolicity, *is it actually so* in the case in question? that is, does it also serve to prove the divine authority of primitive tradition? Does the early ecclesiastical creed rest upon such evidence of antiquity and general consent, as to afford a satisfactory proof of its divine origin?

For the resolution of this question, a few separate observations may be requisite on the two branches into which the canon, though apparently consisting of three, resolves itself—antiquity and general consent.

1. Antiquity is represented as evidence of doctrinal verity, according to the canon of Tertullian, “whatever is

* Proph. Office of the Church, p. 69.

first is true: whatever is posterior is adulterate.”* If this refer to the “first” teaching of the Apostles, it is an undisputed truism; for whatever they promulgated, must be true, and any doctrine subsequently broached for revealed truth, must be spurious, as resting only upon human uninspired authority. But how can this operate either for or against tradition? Though the doctrines preached by the Apostles are divine, it does not follow that believers in the next succeeding ages maintained ALL the apostolical doctrines, without additions, and without adulterations. They neither possessed nor do they claim infallibility; and as they were not, any more than their successors, secured from error, they might mistake or corrupt the truth.

But antiquity is defended by analogy to the practice and usages of courts of law: “If a maxim or custom can be traced back to a time, whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary; if it pervade all the different courts, established in different provinces, for the administration of justice; and, thirdly, if it be generally acknowledged in such sort, that contrary decisions have been disallowed, and held invalid: then, whatever the exceptions to it may be, it is presumed to be part and parcel of our common law. On principles exactly analogous, the church practices and rules above mentioned, and several others ought, we contend, apart from all Scripture evidence, to be received as traditionary or common laws ecclesiastical.”†

The answer is not difficult. To render the analogy complete, it must be shown that the practices and usages of courts of law have remained unchanged, and been transmitted absolutely free from error. But so far from this being the fact, important changes have taken place in legal

* Adv. Prax. § 2. In another treatise, Tertullian says, “That which was first delivered [to mankind] is true, and sanctioned by the Lord; but that which has been introduced later, is extraneous and false.” De Præscript. Hæret. § 31. See Faber, on Calvinism, Pref. and pp. 9, 183.

† Keble, Sermon on Prim. Trad. p. 33.

proceedings. The practice of the courts of law have been different at different times; what was the custom of one age has been abolished at another; what was held to be common law at one period, has been declared not to be so at another. Here, then, the analogy pleaded for makes rather against, than in favour of ecclesiastical tradition, which to be valid must be unvaried.

The analogy fails, moreover, in another essential point. Long continuance is enough to establish the usages of civil law, without showing WHEN they originated; whereas, this last circumstance is indispensable for proving a doctrine to be apostolical. Bossuet, indeed, confidently asserts it to be "a most certain sign a doctrine comes from the Apostles, when it is universally embraced by all Christian churches, without any possibility of showing its beginning;"* meaning, probably, when it cannot be shown, to be a novel doctrine in the church. But this is not sufficient for the confirmation of its apostolicity; it must be further proved, that it actually originated with the inspired teachers of Christianity. It is the fact, that certain doctrines had an apostolical origin, which forms the reason for our receiving them as *divine*; while, on the other hand, our ignorance when they began, forms a sufficient reason for rejecting them. Our inability, therefore, to trace the origin of a doctrine, cannot be a proof of its apostolicity.

Hence antiquity, independently of other considerations, will not prove a doctrine to be apostolical. If it be accompanied with the condition annexed by Bossuet, the being "universally embraced by all Christian churches;" or, as he states it, a little after, "when received from the very commencement of the church;" another line of argument is proposed, and one which would be valid, if it means a reception by the Catholic or Universal church of Christ, and not by one or more particular churches, as observed in the first section of this chapter.

* Exposition of the Catholic Doctrine, § xviii.

2. With respect to the second branch of the canon, the generally consentient testimony of the apostolic churches, it is admitted, may establish the divine authority of tradition. But, then, it must be continuous; that is, must have descended in an unbroken line from the times of the Apostles. Supposing a universal consent to have existed at a certain period, it would be no absolute proof of apostolicity; for we know that corrupt doctrines had crept into some churches; and if into some, then, by possibility, into all that we are acquainted with; and the doubt would still remain, whether this unanimity was, or was not, accordant with evangelical truth. The general consent must be traced from the beginning downwards to the period appealed to, and distinctly shown to have existed during the whole intervening time. Any failure in the proof here, entirely nullifies the evidence of general consent, the whole force of which consists in an unbroken continuity.

Express testimony is not always requisite for such proof. In some cases it may safely rest upon inference. A document, for instance, may be discovered, bearing so indisputably the marks and character of a preceding age, as to leave no doubt of its being a production of that date. If for a certain space of time historical testimony were wanting, the authenticity of the Christian Scriptures might be inferred from internal evidence, while the multiplication of copies in all countries amply attests the general integrity of the text. But it is not so with the traditive creed; if it cannot be evidently traced up to the Apostles, we can have no security that it did not originate at a subsequent period, and so be spurious.

Again, it is not the uninterrupted succession of the doctrinal system in a single church, however pure upon the whole, which can fairly be recognised as general consent. Hence, the strength of the evidence thence arising, will be in proportion to the extent of the alleged unanimity, which, like all other ancient facts, rests upon historical testimony; the inquiry therefore is, whether such testimony

can be produced to establish what may reasonably be deemed the general consent of antiquity in doctrinal matters?

The obvious mode of deciding this point is, *first*, by examining what DIRECT TESTIMONIES can be found for or against a doctrinal unanimity in primitive times; and, *secondly*, by an INDUCTION OF PARTICULAR DOCTRINES, as those, for instance, in the Apostles' creed, and, inquiring whether each was generally held by the churches. Confining the investigation for the present to the former, the single question is, whether the ancient ecclesiastical writers *attest* that such a unanimity in some one doctrinal system existed during the earlier ages, as to form sufficient evidence for believing that system to be apostolical?

The writers who maintain the affirmative assert, that all the churches founded by the Apostles, though dispersed in different parts of the world, interpreted Scripture in one uniform sense, and agreed in the same system of doctrines, which they declared with one voice they had received from some one of the Apostles, up to whom they severally carried their ecclesiastical succession; and, if any novelty arose, it was at once denounced and stifled by the consentient reprobation of the churches.

As to the continuance of this alleged unity, they widely differ; some extending it to a much longer period than others:* but this is merely a subordinate question; for if such a general consent, as has been above defined, can be established in the ante-Nicene ages, it will invest the ecclesiastical creed of that period with a sacred authority. "The argument," says Dr. Waterland, "was undoubtedly true and just, while there were no breaks in the succession of doctrine, but a perfect *unanimity* of the churches all along in the prime articles; though, afterwards, the force of this argument came to be obscured, and almost lost, by taking in things foreign to it, and blending it with what

* See ante, chap. i. § ii. p. 15.

happened in later times. The force of it could last no longer than such *unanimity* lasted. I say, while the churches were all *unanimous* in the main things (as they were in Irenæus's time, and Tertullian's, and for more than a century after,) that very *unanimity* was a presumptive argument that their faith was right, derived down to them from the Apostles themselves."*

Unquestionably so; assuming that the early churches were "all unanimous in the main things." Now the witnesses appealed to in support of the alleged fact of unanimity are Irenæus, (lib. i. cap. 10, alias 3, lib. iii. cap. 3,) Tertullian, (Præscript. xx. xxviii,) Hegesippus, (Ap. Euseb. lib. iv. cap. 22,) Clemens Alexandrinus, (Strom. vii. p. 898, 899, Conf. Strom. i. p. 322,) and Origen, (in Apolog. Pamp. inter Opp. Hieron. tom. v. p. 223.) Dr. Hook cites the same authorities, having apparently borrowed them from Waterland, to prove "that in all the apostolical churches, in all the different parts of the world, a harmony of doctrine existed."†

It is not to be dissembled that passages are found in the ecclesiastical writers here named, in which reference is made to apostolical tradition; but before they can be adduced to justify the inference attempted to be drawn from them by Drs. Waterland and Hook, it must be first ascertained what the writers intended by the term, and how they applied it:—whether the expressions are to be understood in the most general sense, or with some reservation; and whether they are accompanied with others which require some deductions to be made from the universality of their declarations. These are important considerations, and must never be lost sight of, as being indispensable in forming a right judgment of the testimony of the fathers on the subject in question; and a few preliminary observations may facilitate the application of them.

* Import. of the Doctr. of the Trin. chap. vii. § v. on the Use and Value of Eccles. Antiq. In the same way, Weismann reasons, Hist. Eccles. Nov. Test. Secul. ii. § 22.

† Five Sermons, p. 103.

First, it was out of the power of any one of them, or of all in the first three centuries, whose works are extant, to have ascertained what was the doctrine of ALL the apostolical churches. Hence, the declarations above referred to must be received with some, and, taking into account the impediments to a frequent intercourse among ancient nations, with considerable limitations.

Secondly, that heretical and false opinions had sprung up even in the infancy of the church, had grown with its growth, and increased with its strength, is an undeniable fact, confirmed by the above cited writers themselves, a great part of whose works are occupied in refuting them. As they cannot be supposed so self-contradictory as to assert a perfect doctrinal uniformity in the primitive ages, whatever intimations they may give respecting it must be taken with some, and, considering also that they enumerate a multitude of heresies, with extensive limitations.

Thirdly, certain heretics of the early ages either rejected a large portion of the Scriptures as received by the church, or mutilated and corrupted them, or acknowledged several spurious books. In such cases to argue on Scripture grounds was out of the question; and the Fathers could only appeal to the traditionary doctrine received by the churches, not as being infallible or equipotent with Scripture, but as being the only common ground of argument.

Certain heretics, again, contended that their peculiar notions were according to the apostolical doctrine, which, they alleged, had been conveyed to them in all its purity by tradition; but which had in process of time been perverted by their opponents. To this allegation the Fathers answered, that the contrary was the fact; that the true apostolical doctrine was preserved by the churches to which they belonged; and this assertion they defended by an argument of probability; that as it was altogether unlikely so many churches should have erred in the same manner, the doctrine which was *then* held by them might

fairly be presumed to have been originally derived from their apostolical founders.*

Fourthly, the Fathers sometimes gave the name of “tradition” to Scripture itself, agreeably to its most extensive sense; and sometimes to the creed, or summary of necessary articles of faith handed down in the apostolic churches. This they designated as the rule of faith, to which they appealed as being a system of doctrines really contained in Scripture, and capable of being proved thereby, though not expressed in the same terms. In the writings of Irenæus and Tertullian especially, we find frequent references to it, and sometimes as being apostolical; not, however, as being a tradition independent of Scripture, but as being the very doctrine of the Scriptures themselves, as constantly understood by the true members of the Catholic church, from the first to their own age. Such tradition was in truth a compendium of these doctrines; and of course an appeal to it was in fact an appeal to Scripture; and the maintenance of it was equivalent to the maintenance of the supreme authority of the Scriptures, of which it imbodyed the necessary doctrines.†

Lastly, the Fathers declare with one voice that the Scriptures contain all things necessary to be known, believed, and practised for salvation. Not only do they abound with testimonies to this purpose, but also in the confutation of erroneous and heretical notions make their ultimate appeal to them. “The Apostles at first owned these writings; the churches received them; they transmitted them to their posterity; they grounded their faith upon them; they proved their propositions by them; by them they confuted heretics; and they made them the

* Irenæus, l. iii. c. 2, see Grabe’s note, and l. i. c. 1. § 15; Clem. Alex. Strom. l. vii. sub. fin.; Tertullian, De Præscript. § 38. See Whitby, Treatise of Tradition, p. ii. chap. viii. § 5; Waterland, Import. of Trin. chap. vii. § 9; Burnet, Expos. of the Art. VI.; Mosheim, De Reb. Christ. ante Const. Cent. 2, cap. 21, note; Bp. Kaye, Account of Clem. Alexandr. chap. viii.

† “In Tertullian’s view of the subject,” says Bp. Kaye, “the genuine Scriptures evidently formed a part of the apostolic tradition.” Eccles. Hist. illustrated from Tertullian, p. 301. note. See Fulke, Rhem. Test. on 2 Thess. ii. 15.

measures of right and wrong: all that collective body of doctrines, of which all Christians consentingly made public confessions, and on which all their hopes of salvation did rely, were all contained in them; and they agreed in no point of faith which is not plainly set down in Scripture."* The traditionary doctrine, then, to which they appeal, was regarded, not as divine but human authority; and was used in subordination to the Scripture, which they received as the only sacred standard of faith and of godliness.

These preliminary observations will enable us to estimate rightly the real force of the patristical testimony to a uniform tradition in the primitive churches. It must also be borne in mind that, whatever evidence they may bear to a general consent in doctrines, it will be of no avail, unless it can be traced up to the inspired teachers of Christianity. There will be a break in the chain of evidence; there will be a deficiency in the proof of its being continuous, which, as observed before (p. 44,) is requisite to establish the apostolicity of primitive tradition.

The first testimony referred to is Irenæus (lib. i. c. 3, lib. iii. c. 3,) where mention is made of a continuous tradition preserved in the apostolic churches. To these, other corresponding passages might be added, (as lib. i. c. 2, lib. iii. c. 4, and 40, lib. iv. c. 43, and 45, lib. v. Præfat. and c. 20, edit. Grabe.) Indisputably this venerable Father asserts a doctrinal uniformity; but in order to understand his real drift it must be recollected that he is arguing against the Gnostic heretics, who pretended to have learned the genuine doctrine of the Gospel by means of tradition. To this he replies, that the allegation is not true; that the churches founded by the Apostles never admitted, and

* Bp. Jer. Taylor, *Dissuasive from Popery*, vol. x. p. 385. ed. Heber. "Whenever they (the Fathers) formally prove a doctrine, they have recourse to Scripture; they bring forward tradition first; they use it as a strong antecedent argument against individual heretics who profess to quote Scripture; but in council they ever verify it by the written Word." Newman, *Lectures on the Proph. Off. of the Church*, p. 342.

never taught the extravagant tenets broached by these heretics, but always maintained and delivered down the orthodox faith (lib. ii. c. 3.) He thus meets his opponents on their own ground; asserting that tradition, to which they appealed, was totally opposed to them. From such an argumentum ad hominem nothing can be inferred as to the degree of authority which he attributed to tradition.

Again, when Irenæus speaks of a uniform tradition, he seems generally to refer to the Catholic church, which, he contends, is the custodier of the Scriptures, and of the true doctrine of Christ. He speaks of "the church spread through the whole world, even to the boundaries of the earth, received from the Apostles and their disciples," &c. (lib. i. c. 2.) "We ought not to seek among others, the truth which it is easy to receive from the Church; since the Apostles have most abundantly deposited in it all things appertaining to the truth, as in a rich depository, so that every one who will may draw therefrom the drink of life:" (lib. iii. c. 4,) "true and stable is the teaching of the church, by which the same one path of salvation is shown to the whole world." (lib. iv. c. 20.) In the Præfat. to this book he states that "the church has safely preserved throughout the whole world the doctrine received from Christ and the Apostles, and hath delivered it to her children." In another place (lib. iv. c. 45, and 52,) he says the true doctrine is lodged in the hands of those who are presbyters in the church, from whom it may be learned. In the passages which contain the strongest attestations to a doctrinal uniformity, (lib. i. c. 3, lib. iii. c. 3,) he speaks of the church dispersed throughout the whole world, and consisting of particular churches; which evidently shows that he is referring to the unanimity of the true Catholic church of Christ; which, he represents, is every where the unerring guardian and teacher of the right faith. Now, as shown in the first section of this chapter, this unquestionable true character of the Catholic church will not prove the *divine* authority of the traditions of particular

churches, when error and heresy had been widely predominant.

If in some places Irenæus may seem to speak of a general unanimity actually existing, it is probably only to be understood in reference to the reputed orthodox; since his own work, written in confutation of heretics, demonstrates the unanimity not to have been universal. To this again some farther limitations must be made; for Irenæus could not assert from personal knowledge that the churches, both oriental and occidental, professed one and the same faith; and no documentary evidence is adduced in confirmation of it. What information he possessed, or through what channel derived, it is impossible to say; but it could not be co-extensive with the wide-spread boundaries of the Christian religion; and what he says respecting an entire agreement in doctrine must, therefore, be regarded as the declaration of his own belief, rather than the assertion of a fact.

That Irenæus did not attribute a *sacred* authority to the tradition of the church, is plain from this, that he does not rest any article of faith upon it, but, throughout his entire work in the support of doctrinal matters refers to the Scriptures as sufficient and decisive; and, in the refutation of heretics, he expressly declares, at the end of the second book, and in the Præfat. to the third, that he will draw his proofs from them (*ex S. S. inferemus ostensiones.*) Even, as Stillingfleet observes, “where he speaks most of tradition, he makes the resolution of faith to be wholly and entirely into Scripture; and they who apprehend otherwise, do either take the citations out of him upon trust, or else only search him for the words of those citations, and never take the pains to inquire into the scope and design of his discourse.”*

This will be farther apparent from the paramount authority which he constantly ascribes to the sacred writings,

* Rational Account of the Grounds, &c. P. i. chap. ix. § 4. Vide Deylingius, *Observ. Sacræ.* vol. iv. Exercit. i. § iv.

which he denominates "divine," (lib. i. c. 46;) "the oracles of God," (lib. i. c. 1, § 15;) "the Scriptures of the Lord," (lib. ii. c. 66;) "the foundation and pillar of our faith," (lib. iii. c. 1; also c. 11, p. 221.) He asserts that what the Apostles preached they afterwards committed to writing, and that, too, by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, (lib. iii. c. 1, 17, 18;) that the Scriptures are of God (lib. iii. c. 23, 24;) that they are "perfect as being dictated by the Word of God, and his Spirit," (lib. ii. c. 47;) that they are "a rule of truth," viz. a true rule of faith (lib. iv. c. 69. sub. fin.) In stating how well he recollected the figure, preaching, and sermons of Polycarp, the disciple of St. John, he asserts that this venerable man "reported all things agreeably to the Scriptures;" which shows that Irenæus deemed it right to judge of the tradition transmitted even by an apostolical Father by the standard of the sacred Writings. He declares that "all the Scriptures, both the prophecies and the Gospels, are clear and without ambiguity, and may be understood alike by all (lib. ii. c. 46, comp. lib. iv. c. 32;) that we are to be thoroughly imbued with them (lib. v. c. 20;) and denounces as highly culpable those who neglect, or in any way pervert them (lib. i. c. 1, § 15, lib. iii. c. 1, lib. v. c. 30.)

No man of sane mind would write in such a strain who did not believe in the sufficiency and supremacy of the Scriptures as a rule of life; or who believed in tradition as another apostolical standard of the doctrines of Christianity. Hence Irenæus, though of all the ancient Fathers accounted the most favourable to the claims of tradition, must clearly have regarded it only as auxiliary, as a weapon that could be effectually wielded against some heretics, but still as subordinate to the Scriptures, as only constituting a kind of evidence secondary to them.

The next witness cited is Tertullian; (Præscript. xx. xxviii.;) to which might be added, § xix. xxxi. xxxvi.; which last bears such a similitude to Irenæus, lib. iii. c. 2, that Mosheim with great probability supposes Tertullian

to have had it in view at the time of his writing it.* But perhaps the strongest testimony to be found in Tertullian is § xxi., in which he says, "what Christ revealed and the Apostles taught can no otherwise be known than by the churches which they founded and taught, both by word of mouth, and afterwards by their epistles. Such being the case it is clear that every doctrine which agrees with these apostolical and mother churches is to be accounted true, and accordant with that which the churches received from the Apostles, the Apostles from Christ, and Christ from God; and that all other doctrines are to be judged false, contrary to the truth of the churches, of the Apostles, of Christ, and of God."

From the whole tenor of the treatise *De Præscriptione Hæreticorum*, it is evident that Tertullian adopts the same train of reasoning in regard to the apostolical succession of doctrine as Irenæus; both appealing to it as merely a subsidiary evidence. Of this, as respects Tertullian, it is unnecessary to adduce specific proof, since we are assured by a living prelate, who has examined the works of this, as well as of other ancient Fathers with diligence, learning, and judgment, that Tertullian, "far from lending any sanction, is directly opposed to the Roman Catholic notion respecting tradition;"—"that though interpretations which had received the sanction of the church were not to be lightly rejected, yet the practice of Tertullian himself proves that he believed every Christian to be at liberty to exercise his own judgment upon them. The language of Tertullian corresponds exactly with that of the church of England in the 20th Article. According to him the church is the witness and keeper of Holy Writ; but so far is he from thinking that the church can either decide any thing against Scripture, or prescribe any thing not contained in it, as necessary to salvation, that he uniformly and strenuously insists

* *De Reb. Christ. ante Const.* Cent. ii. § 21, note.

*upon the exact agreement between the tradition preserved in the church, and the doctrine delivered in Scripture.”**

The next witness, and contemporary with Irenæus, is Hegesippus, who, as reported by Eusebius, declares that, “in travelling to Rome he visited many bishops, and received from them all one and the same doctrine.” Eusebius then subjoins a citation from Hegesippus in which he says, “the church of the Corinthians continued in the true faith until the episcopate of Primus;” and after some observations adds, “in every succession (i. e. of bishops) and in every city, the doctrine continues such as is preached by the law, the prophets, and the Lord.” From this it is inferred that “the two matters which Hegesippus attests about the middle of the second century, or about some fifty years after the death of St. John, are the perfect doctrinal uniformity of all churches, and the constantly asserted derivation of this common doctrinal system from Christ and his Apostles.”†

Now the testimony of Hegesippus at most extends no further than to the bishops and cities visited by him in his journey to Rome. These constituted only a very small section of the Christian world; and allowing their doctrinal uniformity, it is far wide of establishing the doctrinal uniformity of ALL the churches. Besides, it is clear from the evidence of Hegesippus himself, that the prevalence of heresy was even in his day extensive and lamentable; for, as Eusebius assures us, he gave “an account of the heresies which arose in his days;” and in a fragment preserved by this historian, Hegesippus states that “the church continued a pure and undefiled virgin till the death of Simeon,

* Eccles. Hist. illustr. from Tertullian, p. 296, second edition. The same view of Tertullian's doctrine concerning tradition is given by Whitby, Treat. of Trad. P. II. ch. viii.; Lardner, Credibility, chap. xxvii. § 15; Waterland, Imp. of Doctr. of the Trinity, chap. vii. § v.; Chillingworth, Relig. of Prot. Chap. vi. § 40. The learned Routh, who has obliged the literary world by an edition of various ancient ecclesiastical works, says, “Ipse Septimius ex sacra Scriptura malos ejusdem interpretes nusquam non, cum gubernaculo sanæ, quam putabat, interpretationis, refutare solet.” *Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Opuscula*, vol. i. p. 191.

† Faber, Apostol. of Trinitarianism, vol. ii. p. 252.

when it became corrupted with vain opinions; and, after enumerating various sects and heretics, adds, "from these came false christs, false prophets, false apostles, who broke the unity of the church by destructive doctrines against God and against the Christ."*

Here, then, is full evidence of an extensive corruption having invaded the Christian church, even at an early period; and therefore the testimony of Hegesippus, far from proving "the perfect doctrinal uniformity of all the churches" of his age, must be taken with some limitations. Yet, even with these limitations it is a strong evidence to the point in question, as it attests clearly enough that the same system of doctrines was held in his time to a considerable extent; which, though not of such a character as to prove apostolicity, contributes an effective collateral support to such articles as can be shown to have been part of the same system.

The last witness is Clemens Alexandrinus, who makes mention of the "true tradition;" (*Strom. lib. vii. p. 762, D*;) "divine tradition;" (*lib. i. p. 274, D*;) "the tradition of the Lord," *lib. vii. p. 764, B*. I use the Paris edit. 1529,) and often elsewhere speaks of it; but he does not appear to have meant by it the public belief of the church; and never asserts a unanimity in the profession of it by the Christians of his own times. Even in the seventh book of the *Stromata*, towards the end of which are the strongest passages relating to tradition and the Catholic church, he rests his doctrines upon the Scriptures, declaring that they are "divine and inspired;" that they contain "the true rule of faith and life;" that "the voice of the Lord speaks in them;" that "the proof of what we believe is to be obtained from them;" that "their testimony affords demonstration;" that it is our duty to search them, and, consequently, the heretics are to be condemned for perverting them. Clement every where appeals to them as

* Eusebius, *Hist. Eccles. lib. iii. c. 31, lib. iv. c. 22*. Some, as Valesius, contend that the passage in the last reference relates solely to the church of Jerusalem; but the expressions are clearly general; see Routh, *Reliq. Sac.*, vol. i. p. 233.

the only pure source of divine knowledge. By tradition, therefore, he clearly meant either the doctrine delivered down in the sacred writings, or some explication of their more mysterious and spiritual meaning, quite distinct from the traditive creed of the Church, the knowledge of which was not vouchsafed to all believers, but which he deemed indispensable to be understood by the true Gnostic, or genuine Christian, whom he delights to describe.

But it is unnecessary to enlarge upon the testimony of Clemens Alexandrinus, or to extend the examination to the writings of Origen and others; for if the evidence of Irenæus, Tertullian, and Hegesippus, is insufficient to confirm the uniformity and purity of the primitive creed, that of subsequent writers must be unavailing.

Nor is it necessary to dwell upon the argument urged by Dr. Hook, that "the whole discipline of the Church was organized for the very purpose of ascertaining and preserving the 'quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus.'"^{*} The statement is not borne out by facts: the ecclesiastical organization was not so perfect among the churches scattered through Germany, Gaul, Spain, as well as in Africa, Egypt, and the East. Of this every one must be convinced who will examine the evidence produced by Dr. Hook, and what has been collected upon the subject by the eminent writers named below.[†] The evidence, likewise, which they have brought forward, comes too late to connect the alleged organization with the early post-apostolic age. And, at all events, it can only be regarded, as Dr. Hook expresses it, as "a machinery by which the whole Church *could* be preserved in unity," not by which it actually *was* so preserved; and, therefore, the asserted fact of an organized union among the ancient churches, supposing it to be true, amounts only to a presumption of a unanimity in doctrine.

* Five Sermons, p. 103.

† Bingham, Antiq. lib. xvi. c. i. Barrow, on the Unity of the Church, § v. viii. ix.

From this brief review of the express testimony of the Fathers to a general consent among the primitive believers, its insufficiency is apparent. Though they frequently speak of, and appeal to ecclesiastical tradition, yet it is always under circumstances which show that they did not consider it as being in itself the groundwork of faith. In disputes with heretics, they adduced it as being the shortest and easiest, perhaps the only, method of confuting them; in explaining the Christian faith they cite it, but for the most part with an evident intention to limit it to the tradition of the orthodox: in confirmation of doctrines they appeal to it, but either as including Scripture, or merely as collateral and corroborative evidence. In no passage do they state it as authoritative abstracted from Scripture; while, on the other hand, they constantly and unreservedly assert the supreme authority of Holy Writ. They also admit and lament the spread of heretical opinions to a wide extent; so that their testimony fails to establish the unanimity alleged among the primitive Christians.

It likewise fails in another essential point—in showing the continuity of consent, without intermission, from the first planting of Christianity. The primary and connecting link in the chain of evidence is wanting. The earliest authorities appealed to are Irenæus, who did not flourish till late in the second century, having suffered martyrdom about one hundred years after the death of St. John, the last of the Apostles, and Hegesippus, who was contemporary with Irenæus. The other authorities flourished at a still later period. There is thus a chasm which cannot be supplied; and a failure in tracing at any one period, the uncontaminated descent of tradition from the Apostles, subverts the very foundation upon which the high authority claimed for it is built. Whatever presumptive evidence there may be for an ecclesiastical consent to certain doctrines, we have no *express* attestation to it till the time of Irenæus; and his testimony, as we have seen, is far from decisive; so that patristical evidence fails to prove what

is indispensable—the uninterrupted succession of the doctrines from the first promulgators.

Let us now proceed to the second mode laid down (p. 45) for determining the general consent of antiquity in doctrinal matters; namely, an induction of particular doctrines. Though the express attestations of the ancient Fathers are insufficient to establish it, it cannot be deemed to be *impossible* to show from existing ecclesiastical documents, that certain articles of faith were generally held by the Christians of the primitive ages. Take the divinity of Christ, for instance, and, indisputably, it *may*, by a particular examination, be proved to have been the general belief for the first three centuries, though no *direct* evidence for such concurrent belief can be found. So also with respect to the other leading doctrines of Christianity; if a general consent in them can any how be traced up to the Apostles, it will be strong, perhaps satisfactory, evidence of their apostolicity.

This inductive process is the more flattering, as it opens the door of admissibility to a number of witnesses, which, as they bear no direct testimony to a doctrinal unanimity, would otherwise be excluded. The apostolical Fathers, so far from being witnesses to a then existing unanimity, actually attest the prevalence of error and dissonant tenets; and there is not a single passage in them from which it can be collected, that they attributed any authority to oral instruction independent of the Scriptures.* The same may be said of Justin Martyr, Theophilus Antiochenus,

* Roman Catholic writers plead the support of Ignatius, on the authority of Eusebius, who says that Ignatius, in his admonitions to the Churches, “exhorted them to hold fast to the tradition of the Apostles; which tradition, confirmed by his own testimony, for the more sure information of posterity, he deemed it necessary to commit to writing.” Such is the rendering by Berington and Kirk, in “Faith of Catholics,” &c., p. 117, following the Latin version of Valesius. But the Greek is *ἡν ὑπὲρ ἀσφαλείας καὶ ἐγγράφως ἢ διὰ μαρτυρομένου διατυπώσθαι ἀναγκαῖον ἦλθε*, which means “having borne his own testimony (i. e. by his exhortations to the Churches) he exhorted them to hold fast the tradition of the Apostles, which, on account of security, he deemed it necessary to be committed to writing,” i. e. by the Apostles. It is thus a testimony not to tradition, but to the pre-eminent value of the apostolical writings.

Athenagoras, Tatian, and others, the fragments of whose works are still remaining; yet they all supply evidence, to a greater or less extent, respecting the doctrines which were received in their age.

So do the liturgical remains of the churches in the primitive times. It is a question of much difficulty how far those which have been published are authentic, and how high in antiquity they remount; for their value will rise in proportion; but no man can seriously peruse the writings of Comber, Bingham, Brett, Palmer, &c., relating to them, without being impressed with the importance of the subject. Notwithstanding the researches hitherto made, much remains to be done for facilitating the study of the ancient liturgies, and for dispelling the doubts which have been not unreasonably entertained. It were much to be wished that so useful a task would be undertaken by the learned author of the “Antiquities of the English Ritual.”

From these sources it may be possible to ascertain the transmission of certain articles of faith from the Apostles. Ignatius, for instance, had been conversant with the Apostles, and was a disciple of St. John. Polycarp had been taught immediately by the Apostles; had conversed with many, who had seen the Lord; and was ordained bishop of Smyrna by the hands of St. John. Irenæus was the pupil of Polycarp; and there were probably many similar instances; so that the Church at the end of the second century could not be separated from the Apostolic Church by more than two intervening descents.* Thus, the ascertained creed of the *third* century *may* perhaps be traced up to a divine and apostolical origin.

But, admitting the possibility, it must be borne in mind, that antiquity alone will not suffice to form a *proof* of apostolicity. Error sprung up in the first age of Christianity, and an uninterrupted succession of a particular doctrine *may* be an uninterrupted succession of error. It must,

* See the authorities in Wake, Diss. to Apostol. Fathers; Waterland, Import. of the Doctr. of the Trin. chap. vii. § iv.

therefore, be also shown, that it was received by the churches so generally as to leave no room to doubt its apostolic origin. Both requirements are equally necessary for evincing any doctrine to be apostolical; but, as has been shown, there is not historic evidence for the required consent and unanimity in the faith; while, on the other hand, there is undoubted evidence of an extended heterodoxy; and, consequently, no existing historical testimony can *prove* the apostolicity of any article in the primitive creed.

Although this is the inevitable conclusion, it is not meant to disparage the evidence, which can be thus furnished for the truth of particular doctrines. When, for instance, we consult the apostolical Fathers, and consider that they were cotemporary with the Apostles, by whom they were instructed in the Christian religion, and instituted to be its preachers; that they took every care to transmit it undefiled; that they were men of unblemished character, and filled important offices in the ministry of the word; and that their writings were approved by the churches, and sometimes publicly read for the edification of the faithful, we can scarcely doubt that what they deliver as essential articles, accords with the pure doctrine of the Gospel. The Fathers next in succession, though not of equal authority, were pious and faithful men, and so to be looked upon as honest witnesses to the doctrines of the cross. When, therefore, any article of faith can be traced through the medium of their evidence up to the Apostles, and can be shown to have been received as a genuine doctrine of the Gospel, to a very considerable extent by the ancient churches, it is not, indeed, an absolute proof of apostolicity, yet, a strong, perhaps the strongest *human* testimony, that can be given to the truth.

In collecting and ponderating this evidence, each particular doctrine requires a separate examination, inasmuch as it rests upon its own distinct grounds. Hence, the testimony will vary in force according to its application to different articles of faith. While to some it affords but

slender evidence, others will be confirmed by it with all the weight of its venerable authority.

The historical testimony in support of general consent and antiquity, having now been examined, the result is, that it fails to prove such a continuous unanimity in doctrine as is requisite for the proof of apostolicity; it nevertheless goes to establish a consent of the churches, sufficiently ancient and general to form a strong body of evidence; so strong, indeed, that it is impossible for a candid mind to reflect upon it, without a conviction that a reverential respect is due to the voice of primitive antiquity, that in all Scriptural investigations, appeal ought always to be made to it, not as a *divine* authority, but as a most valuable attestation to the true faith.

CHAPTER III.

PRESUMPTIVE EVIDENCE TO THE AUTHORITY OF TRADITION.

I. AMONG the privileges granted to the Church is that of being the teacher of religion; and, as preaching is the appointed method of executing this office, an argument is thence derived in favour of tradition. Christ, it is said, does not appear to have given his Apostles any command to *write* the Gospel, but to *preach* it, Matt. x. 7, Mark xvi. 16, Luke ix. 2. In this ministry they spent their lives, traversing cities, provinces, kingdoms; constantly *preaching* the Gospel of the kingdom; declaring the whole counsel of God, Acts xx. 17, et seq.; expounding it by word as well as by letter, 1 Cor. xi. 23: 2 Thess. ii. 2: and delivering "the traditions" for the observance of the faithful, 1 Cor. xi. 2: 2 Thess. ii. 15. iii. 6. Many years elapsed before any work came from their pen; only a part of them

wrote any thing; and when they did write, local circumstances gave birth to their writings, which were addressed to particular persons, or particular congregations, and on particular occasions. Hence it is inferred, that the written word was not designed to be the sole rule of faith; but that *preaching* (in other words, tradition) is requisite for the full development of the religion of Jesus.*

Christ, it is true, laid the foundation of his Church by preaching, which oral instruction was, consequently, the first rule of Christianity, and for a time remained the only one; but it cannot be inferred from this circumstance that any of the doctrines of our Lord were designed to be always so transmitted. The word used by our Saviour signifies *to publish abroad, to teach, to deliver any doctrine publicly*, without specifying any particular mode of doing it;† his language, therefore, does not limit the injunction to oral teaching. Besides, different expressions are used in the grand apostolical commission given after our Lord's resurrection—"Go ye, and teach (*μαθητευσατε*) all nations—teaching them (*διδασκοντες*,") &c., Matt. xxviii. 19; which surely delegates to the Apostles full power to use every means, whether preaching or written instructions, that would be most effectual in making disciples of all nations, and instructing them to observe all Christ's commands.

The argument thus rests upon an unstable foundation. Nor does it follow from the apostolic command to *preach* the Gospel, that any of this oral teaching can now be known and ascertained. If it can, there need be no hesitation in admitting the conclusion; but, until it is authenticated by undoubted testimony, the fact that Christianity was first planted by preaching, forms no valid argument in favour of the primitive traditionary doctrine.

II. Romanists appeal with much confidence to the *Disciplina Arcani* of the ancient Christians; from which they

* This is a favourite argument with Romanists; Bossuet, *Expos. Sect. xviii.*; Delahogue, de *Eccles. Milner*, End of Controv. Lett. viii. Lingard, *Collect. of Tracts*, p. 409; Trevern, *Amic. Discus. Lett. iv.*

† See the *Lex. in κρυπτα*; Campbell, *Prel. Diss. vi. p. v. § 9, 10.*

infer that the New Testament was not intended to be a complete record of the Christian religion, but to be accompanied with the supplemental help of tradition; and that, in consequence, the more mysterious doctrines of the Gospel were kept secret from the uninitiated, and communicated only to those who were fully instructed. How admirably adapted this theory is to justify the novel corruptions of their Church is at once apparent; and they have availed themselves of it with eagerness and dexterity;* but not with corresponding success, as will be evident from the following observations.

In the *first* place, however positive they may be in tracing this secret discipline up to the age of the Apostles, there is no evidence of its having been introduced into the Church till after the middle of the second century, probably not till about the end of it. In this the best authorities are agreed, as Baronius, Pagi, Mosheim, Le Clerc, Weismann, Bingham, &c.;† it cannot, therefore, be admitted as a witness to apostolical antiquity. In the *next* place, it is very doubtful what constituted the matter of this secret discipline; but whatever doctrines it included, they could not in the nature of things be long kept secret. Accordingly, as Mr. Newman observes, “the secret tradition soon ceased to exist even in theory. It was authoritatively divulged, and perpetuated in the form of symbols according as the successive innovations of heretics called for its publication. In the creeds of the early councils, it may be considered as having come to light, and so ended; so that whatever has not been thus authenticated, whether such was prophetic information, (2 Thess. ii. 5, 15,) or comment on the past dispensations, (Heb. v. 11,) is from

* By none more so than by Dr. Trevern, *Discus. Amic. Lett.* viii.; *Answer to Faber*, p. ii.

† Baronius, *Annal.* num. xxiv. et seq.; Pagi, *in loc.*; Mosheim, *De Reb. Christ. ante Const.* sec. ii. § 34; Le Clerc, *Hist. Eccles. Ann.* 118, § 3; Weismann, *Hist. Eccles. N. T.* sec. ii. § 17; Bingham, *Antiq. lib.* x. cap. 5. Jablonski thinks that it did not obtain among the orthodox congregations in the second century; *Inst. Hist. Christ.* sec. ii. c. ii. § 5.

the circumstances of the case lost to the Church.”* The *Disciplina Arcani*, then, so far as we can *now* know of it, is identified with the public creed of the Church, and so forms the subject in dispute.

III. The only means, it is alleged, whereby we learn what books have been written by divine inspiration, and what writings are the genuine composition of those Apostles whose names they bear, since Scripture cannot bear witness to itself, is tradition; and if tradition be a safe ground for our belief in the derivation and transmission of the New Testament from its inspired authors, how can it be denied to be a safe ground for our belief in the derivation and transmission of the doctrines orally taught by them to their contemporaries? If the one is to be rejected, so must the other, as both stand on the same basis, namely, tradition; and hence to deride tradition as unworthy of credit, is to undermine the very foundation of our faith in the Scriptures.†

Now the plausibility of this arises entirely from the ambiguity of the term “tradition,” which is here used in the sense of historical testimony; and which, in this sense, is clearly competent to prove what books are canonical, and what traditive doctrines are apostolical. But there may be abundant evidence to support the canon, and very little in support of tradition in the sense of doctrines. It does not therefore follow that, because we assent to the historical evidence in the one case, we must in the other.

But it is farther urged that many rites and precepts, so far from being exclusively contained in Scripture, are derived to us from the Apostles by a purely traditionary practice; and many things necessary to be believed have

* Arians of the fourth century, chap. i. p. 61.

† The often-quoted saying of Augustine, “*Ego Evangelio non crediderim nisi me commoveret Ecclesiæ auctoritas*,” is well illustrated by Stillingfleet, *Rational Account*, chap. vii. § 9. See also Bp. Marsh, *Compar. View*, chap. vii. p. 146. “Tradition” is sometimes taken to mean historical testimony (see ante, c. i. § 1,) and in this sense is competent to prove the canonicity of Scripture, as is generally acknowledged; Hooker, lib. i. c. 14; Field, *Of the Church*, lib. iv. c. 20; Chillingworth *Relig. of Prot. c. ii. § 25*, et al.

but little, if any, warrant in holy Scripture; and must, therefore, be believed if not solely, yet chiefly on the authority of tradition. The observation of the Lord's day, the baptism of infants, the government of the Church by bishops, the consecration of the Eucharist, and certain ecclesiastical ceremonies, are produced as instances. If we receive these, it is argued, because the Church has from the beginning delivered them down as apostolical and essential parts of Christianity, we are bound to receive as our guide to the true doctrines of Scripture that traditional interpretation and summary of them which has been transmitted in the same way, and under the same sanction.

Now as the Church has power to decree rites and ceremonies, and to enforce discipline within the limits of Scripture, these may be put out of the question; and with respect to doctrines, she cannot propose any as necessary articles of faith by her own independent authority, but solely because she finds them in the written Word.* No doctrine, then, necessary to be believed for salvation can rest upon the mere authority of tradition; and if any of the articles above alluded to has not Scriptural support, the just inference would be, that we are wrong in receiving it, not that tradition is adequate authority for it.

IV. Many and great evils, it is said, are the inevitable consequence of not taking primitive tradition as the guide and standard of religious truth. The Lutheran and Genevese churches, it is thought, have purely on this account been led into a sad defalcation from evangelic truth; the one having generally relapsed into Rationalism, and the other into Socinianism; and the Dissenters in our own country, by relying solely upon the Scriptures and the unfettered exercise of private judgment, have fallen into multifarious wild extravagancies. Mr. Newman has cited several instances from the ancient history of the Church, in confirmation that errors more or less serious have been

* See my *Vindication of Church Establishments*, p. ii. chap. iv. § 2.

“introduced professedly on grounds of Scripture, without the safeguard of Catholic Tradition.”*

To examine with philosophic accuracy all the instances adduced, would require a thorough knowledge of the continental churches, and of the dissenting societies, to which the author of these pages has no pretensions; but whether they are really cases in point is at least a disputable matter. Are there any data sufficient to prove the admitted departure from orthodoxy to be entirely owing to the cause assigned? May not other causes have combined to produce it? It is quite inconsequential to assert that, because a Church has apostatized, it is therefore attributable to the neglect of primitive tradition. Proof is required that this was the actual principle which occasioned it. But in every example appealed to, would it not be easy to point out other circumstances which co-operated in producing the evil? Such must surely have been the fact with respect to the instances cited by Mr. Newman; for errors in the early ages could scarcely be owing to a neglect of tradition, when it was most respected, and when, if at any time, it was flowing pure and unalloyed; otherwise tradition is an insecure and illusory safeguard.

But granting the applicability of the cases adduced, the utmost that can be inferred from them is, that a disregard of ecclesiastical antiquity is productive of mischievous effects; it will only follow that tradition ought never to be overlooked in Scriptural exposition, not that it is itself apostolical, and the authoritative interpreter of Scripture.

* Lect. on the Proph. Off. of the Church, Lect. vii.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SCRIPTURAL EVIDENCE TO THE AUTHORITY OF TRADITION.

I. ROMANISTS assert that no truth of religion is more expressly recorded than the authority to which tradition is entitled; and it is not a little startling to find Protestants declaring "that Scripture itself directs us to this Catholic tradition, that it does not suffer itself to be tried at the bar of private judgment alone, that it declares even men of the most cultivated talents insufficient to understand what they read without the guidance of the Church."* If such be really the fact, we must acknowledge the divine authority of Catholic tradition, and receive it with equal veneration as Scripture itself.

The texts to which Mr. Churton appeals, in common with Romanists, to warrant so bold an assertion, are, 1 Cor. xi. 2; xv. 1, 3; 2 Thess. ii. 15; iii. 6; Jude 3; 1 John ii. 24; Rom. xii. 6; 2 Pet. i. 20, 21; 1 Cor. xiv. 32, 33, 36; Heb. xiii. 7, 8. To these may be added the following, referred to by Bellarmine and others; Matt. xviii. 17; xxiii. 2, 3; xxviii. 20; Luke x. 16; John xvi. 13; xx. 30; xxi. 25; Acts i. 3; viii. 27; 1 Cor. xi. 16, 23, 34; 1 Tim. iii. 15; vi. 20; 2 Tim. i. 13, 14; ii. 1, 2; 2 John 12.

Of these, the most relied upon, and the only one referred to by Bossuet in his "Exposition," is 2 Thess. ii. 15: "Stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or our epistle." The Apostle, it is clear, had delivered verbal as well as oral instructions to the Thessalonians; and, of course, whatever he pro-

* Churton, *The Church of England a Witness and Keeper of Catholic Tradition*: a Sermon, p. 8.

claimed, whether by word of mouth or by writing, is to be revered as inspired truth. But the difficulty with us is to ascertain what these verbal instructions were.* With the Thessalonians this could not be a matter of doubt; and if we could be assured, as they were, what oral instructions St. Paul delivered, we should instantly embrace them. But the text leaves us entirely at a loss to discover what they were, and where they are to be found; neither does it at all serve to show that the traditions of the primitive Churches which have come down to us, have been derived from the Apostles.

The Gospel was first communicated by preaching, which, consequently, was the first rule of faith; but the Apostle does not say, hold the traditions which you have been taught by word of mouth, and which never shall be written;† yet the whole force of the argument hangs upon this, that they never were afterwards written; for if they were, it cannot be inferred from this text, that we are bound to receive any unwritten traditions. Now that any doctrine of moment is not now recorded in the sacred Scriptures, is, to say the least, highly improbable. The sacred penmen, under the guidance of inspiration, committed the truths of Christianity to writing; and can it reasonably be supposed that they executed the task in an imperfect manner, and omitted to record any thing essential? For what purpose were they instigated to write, except to leave a lasting and faithful record of the new covenant? It must, at any rate, be admitted, that there are apostolical doctrines not so recorded, before the text in question can be appealed to in support of any tradition of doctrines as distinct from Scripture.‡

* Hey, Lect. in Div. lib. iv. art. vi. § 5; Hawkins, Diss. on Trad., p. 31.

† Patrick, on Trad. in Gibson's Preservative, tit. iv. p. 193.

‡ The term *παράδοσις* is of comprehensive import, and some explain it here as referring to discipline, viz.; "Observe the directions which have been delivered to you;" because in chap. iii. 6 it denotes certain directions for orderly conduct. Marsh, Compar. View, chap. iv. It has reference to personal conduct in 1 Cor. xi. 2. But in 2 Thess. ii. 15, it most probably relates to doctrines, and it is so understood by the most eminent commentators.

Much use has been made of 2 Tim. i. 14: "That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us." By the good thing committed to Timothy, *την καλην παρακαταθηκην*, rather, "the good deposit or trust," Mr. Keble understands "the treasure of apostolical doctrines and Church rules," "the same treasure of doctrine which we know to have been imbodyed in the Confession or Creed," containing "besides the substance of Christian doctrine, a certain form, arrangement, selection, methodizing the whole, and distinguishing fundamentals; and also a certain system of Church practice, both in government, discipline, and worship," "comprising matter independent of, and distinct from, the truths which are directly scriptural."*

To this exposition, however, many are totally opposed, as may be seen in Poole's Synopsis, and other commentators. Neither the context, the parallel passages, the cognate verb *παρατιθημι*, nor versions, establish it beyond a doubt; and if we appeal to primitive tradition, it here deserts us. Mr. Keble, indeed, attempts to prove that it is ratified by the general consent of Christian antiquity, and for that purpose has cited Jerome, Hippolitus, and Vincentius Lirinensis; but though some of the Fathers adopt this view, others explain it differently, instances of which may be found in Suicer.†

But supposing "the good deposit" to denote the Christian doctrine, as being the best supported interpretation, and granting, moreover, that the Church was in possession of the substance of saving truth by the sole teaching of the Apostles; yet the text only enjoins Timothy to guard and keep safe this good deposit of Christian doctrines; and is entirely silent whether the deposit was "independent of, and distinct from, the truths which are directly scriptural;" or *how* it was to be guarded and kept safe. It is, there-

* Serm. on Trad. pp. 16, 20, 21.

† Voc. *παρακαταθηκη*. See Dr. Wilson, Brief Exam. of Prof. Keble's Visitation Sermon.

fore, without any ground in the Apostle's language to assume that it refers to any doctrine distinct from Scripture, or *now* preserved by tradition.

Besides, as observed above on 2 Thess. ii. 15, this deposit either is, or is not, imbodyed in the New Testament. If it is, then the successors of Timothy have a surer record of it than can ever be furnished by any tradition; if it is not, then evidence is demanded that primitive tradition, as we *now* have it, is really the same good deposit which was committed to Timothy by the verbal teaching of the Apostles. Demonstrate this, and primitive tradition will be received without any dispute as coming from inspired men. But how can it, when even Mr. Keble acknowledges it to be a "lost treasure, whereof portions" only remain; and that the mere "fragments of apostolical practice and teaching," "the relics of the Apostles," "the remnant of apostolical tradition," have descended to us?*. At any rate, the text does not say, that the good deposit is to be found in tradition, nor that we are bound to respect any tradition distinct from Scripture.

Nearly the same remarks apply to 1 Tim. vi. 20. "O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust," *την παρακαταθήκην* "the deposit;" and also to 2 Tim. i. 13. "Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me;" which is justly supposed to mean some summary or epitome of belief, conformable to the Scriptures, but distinct from them. Neither of these passages afford evidence that "the form of sound words," or "the deposit" of the Gospel, committed to Timothy, are *now* to be found in tradition.

To as little purpose are those passages which are thought to forbid the unlimited exercise of private judgment; "such as "the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets; for God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints," 1 Cor. xiv. 32, 33; "No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation," 2 Pet.

* Serm. on Trad. pp. 32, 39, 41.

i. 20, 21; comp. Rom. xii. 6; and those which are supposed to point out the necessity of the guidance of the Church for understanding the Scriptures, of which the strongest is the case of the Ethiopian eunuch, who to the question whether he understood what he read, replied, "How can I, except some man should guide me?" Acts viii. 27, et seq. Comp. 1 Cor. xiv. 16; Heb. xiii. 7, 8. But whatever evidence such passages may afford for the necessity of *some* teacher, it is quite gratuitous to infer that tradition must be such necessary teacher.

Of the other texts appealed to, some describe certain powers and privileges of the Church of Christ; as "if he neglect to hear them, tell it to the Church," Matt. xviii. 17. "The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat; all, therefore, whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do," xxiii. 2, 3; "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world," xxviii. 20; "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me," Luke x. 16; "When the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth," John xvi. 13; "If any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the Churches of God," 1 Cor. xi. 16; "The Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth," 1 Tim. iii. 15; from which passages it is inferred that the Church was intended to maintain and teach the truth in all ages, and so to preserve it by a continuous tradition.

The same inference is supposed to result from those texts which seem to ascribe an authority to the instructions, orally delivered by the Apostles; as, Jesus for forty days after his passion, "spake of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God," Acts i. 3; "I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you," 1 Cor. xi. 23; comp. ch. xv. 1, 3; "The rest will I set in order when I come," 1 Cor. xi. 34; "Let that abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning," 1 John ii. 24: "I would not write with paper and ink; but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face," 2 John 12; "That ye should earnestly

contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints," Jude 3; and from those texts, also, which speak of apostolical instructions not recorded in the New Testament; as many things "which are not written in this book," John xx. 30; comp. ch. xxi. 25; 1 Cor. xi. 2; 2 Thess. ii. 15.

Both these sets of texts are irrelevant to the point in dispute. Whatever privileges they may ascribe to the universal Church of Christ, they do not attach inerrancy to particular churches. Whatever authority they may ascribe to the oral teaching of the Apostles, they do not prove that any of it has been otherwise preserved than in the Holy Scriptures. They do not, therefore, warrant the inference, that the traditionary belief of the primitive Christians strictly accorded with the teaching of the Apostles.

Besides the texts which have been examined, some general arguments have been brought forward in support of the authority of tradition. Thus the obscurities of Scripture, it is alleged, are so numerous, and the difficulty of expounding it so great, that it will be impossible to arrive at any certainty without the interpretive guidance of tradition. As this is a matter which will again come under review in the next chapter, it need only be observed here that, even allowing the premises, it does not follow that the transmissive creed of the churches must be such interpretive guide.

It has likewise been argued, that the necessity of tradition is manifested by the very form of the sacred writings, which were composed with a partial design, to suit particular exigencies of the Church, or of individuals, without any thing like systematic arrangement; and also by their abounding with difficulties and obscurities too great for the most cultivated understanding to surmount. Such a mode of reasoning is common; but even admitting the Scriptures to be precisely as they are here represented, it by no means follows, either that the Apostles left any

additional explanation in deposit with the Church, or that any *now* exists, and can *now* be known. And if it did, nothing would be gained, inasmuch as it might reasonably be inferred, that the same obscurities, and the same partial characters would be found in tradition, as proceeding from the same authors.

But it is rash and presumptuous to affirm that the Scriptures, whatever may be their form and manner, are in any way defective. They were written by the inspiration of God, and, of course, their form was not fortuitous, nor did they originate in accidental circumstances. All was ordained by infinite wisdom; and, in whatever light the sacred writings may appear to human and fallible reason, they must be best adapted to attain the end proposed in giving a revelation to man.

Another argument is to this effect, that Scripture nowhere professes to be the sole rule of Christianity, nowhere so much as hints that its own authority was to supersede the authority of the unwritten word, nowhere asserts that it is, by itself, an intelligible rule of faith. So far from it, the Scriptures on the very face of them bear testimony to the contrary. "Doctrinal points of the first importance are often expressed, by the Scriptural writers, in ambiguous terms; statements, apparently contradictory, perplex the understanding of the reader; and we are ultimately compelled to rest on the conjectures of our own judgment, rather than on the decision of the rule.* Hence, it is inferred, that the Scriptures are not sufficiently intelligible as a rule of faith, without the safeguard of tradition.

However specious such a mode of reasoning at first appears, it is certainly inconclusive; since the Scriptures, notwithstanding their silence on the subject, *may* have been intended to form the sole rule, which implies their intelligibility. And that they were so intended, may fairly

* Lingard, Collection of Tracts, p. 417. This argument is frequent with Romanists. So some Protestants; "Clearly as Scripture speaks of the divine inspiration of its writers, it nowhere says that it, by itself, contains all necessary doctrine." Newman, Lect. on the Proph. Offi. of the Ch. p. 331.

be presumed from the fact of their being written, and their doctrines not being left to oral communication; since it cannot be supposed that the Holy Spirit would suggest a written vehicle for the purpose of concealment. Besides the reasoning is self-destructive; for if Scripture is silent as to its own sufficiency and consequent intelligibility, it is also silent respecting the necessity of tradition, as is manifest from the preceding examination of the texts adduced in its support; and if its silence is good evidence in the one case, it must in the other.

II. The alleged Scriptural grounds, then, are far from proving the apostolicity of tradition; let it be inquired whether, on the other hand, the Scriptures bear testimony to their own sufficiency, as a rule of faith. By the rule of faith is meant a rule, whereby to judge of all matters of faith, and by which all doctrines are to be tried; and when it is said that the Scriptures are, in this sense, a full and complete rule, it is meant that they are sufficient for the purpose of proving and establishing our faith. The Church of England does not in so many words call the Scriptures the rule of faith; but she does what is tantamount, when, in the *sixth* Article, she declares, they “contain all things necessary to salvation;” that is, no doctrine is of necessity to be received, except such as may be proved by this infallible standard.

To substantiate the Scriptures to be the rule of faith, it is necessary to prove both their INTELLIGIBILITY and SUFFICIENCY. They may possess the former property and nevertheless not be adequate to form of themselves a full and complete rule. The questions, then, are in some sort distinct, yet they may be simultaneously discussed; and our position will be granted, if it can be shown that the Scriptures bear testimony to their own intelligibility, and also to their own sufficiency for the establishment of the true doctrine of Christ, without the supplemental accompaniment of tradition.

In receiving the sacred Scriptures as an intelligible rule

of faith, it is not meant that they are free from all obscurities, and every where easy to be understood; quite the contrary; they are often of very difficult interpretation. Why the Deity has vouchsafed a revelation, in which some parts are obscure, some ambiguous; why it should require learning and study to investigate their evidence; and why the dispensation of transcendant grace should appear to be encumbered with many difficulties, are questions which will not be suffered to perplex those who, tutored in the school of Butler, well know that to judge of what relates to the divine procedure, in granting a revelation, is beyond the grasp of the human intellect.

Neither is it intended to assert that the Scriptures are throughout plain and perspicuous, even with all the aids we possess for their elucidation, but that they are a rule, sufficiently intelligible, for the confirmation and establishment of faith, to all who are competent by learning and talent to apply it; that a saving knowledge may be gained from them by those who, with the requisite ability, apply with becoming diligence to the study of them, and employ the means which Providence has furnished for understanding them; and that such a knowledge may be imparted to all who will attend to the guides instituted for their instruction.

Now the sufficiency of Scripture is implied in the fact of its being the Word of God, written by his authority. It "came not of old by the will of man," but by the decree of God, and under his superintendence: for what purpose, then, could it have been written, except to preserve an authentic record of his revealed will to his creatures? If so, the whole must be written; for it cannot be supposed that, in causing his will to be thus recorded, he would omit any material portion of it. A partial disclosure of it is wholly inconsistent with the object for which revelation was designed—to be a faithful record of the divine will. The Scriptures, being confessedly such record, must be full

and adequate to accomplish the end proposed; and consequently sufficient, in themselves, to form the rule and standard of faith.

The intelligibility of the Scriptures also, by themselves, is necessarily implied in their very nature as a written revelation; for they would not communicate religious truth, would be in fact no revelation, unless they were intelligible to those who understand the languages in which they are written. If God has revealed his will to man, it follows as a matter of course, that it is discoverable from the writings in which it is recorded. Now it will scarcely be denied that the Scriptures contain this revelation of the divine will, and were consequently designed to communicate the knowledge of it; we are, therefore, constrained to infer that God has adapted them to our comprehension; otherwise they will not attain their object. Hence, their meaning must be ascertainable by the same means which are requisite for understanding all other written communications.

And this is agreeable to the actual fact. Take, for instance, the Epistle to the Romans, which was written by St. Paul before he had ever been in that city, ch. i. 8, 13; xv. 23. Could the Romans understand it *without* an authorized oral interpretation? If they could, so may persons in every succeeding age who have a competent knowledge of the Greek language: if they could not, then we must admit it not to be, what it purposes, a divine revelation, the design of which is to be an intelligible communication. It must, therefore, have been intended to be understood, an intention which the writer, under the guidance of the Spirit, could not fail of accomplishing; and so must have been by itself intelligible to the Romans: and if to them, then also intelligible by itself to us.

The same inference is deducible from the practice of Christ and the Apostles. Our blessed Lord never once refers to tradition for proof, but about twenty times to the Jewish Scriptures; which constant appeal to them, in his

discourses, plainly implies their sufficiency for the conviction of his hearers; but which they could not be, unless they were such writings as could be generally understood. In like manner the Apostles endeavoured to convince the Jews from their own Scriptures, Acts xvii. 2, 3; xviii. 28. In their epistles also, whatever truth they are establishing, or whatever error they are combating, they never argue from tradition, but always from the Scriptures; which is a plain demonstration of their entire disregard to Jewish tradition, and of their conviction that the Old Testament at least is sufficiently clear; otherwise an appeal to it would have been nugatory. Those whom they addressed would have been wholly unable to judge of their reasoning, unless they could understand the documents upon which it was founded. If such was the case with the Old Testament, we must, by parity of reason, affirm the same of the New. The latter is explanatory of the former; and no imaginable reason can be assigned why both the text and the commentary should not be equally intelligible, proceeding, as they do, from the same divine source.

By the especial promise of our Lord, the Apostles were endued with ability to declare fully the whole doctrine of the Gospel; I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries will not be able to gainsay nor resist," Luke xxi. 15. Though the promise here may seem to imply no more than to bestow wisdom of speech, yet he further promises that the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, "shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you," John xiv. 26; comp. ch. xvi. 13. In these words the divine assistance is in no way limited to oral instruction. It would be irrational to suppose that the aid of the Spirit, which enabled them to preach the truth plainly and perspicuously, would desert them when they were committing it to writing. The Holy Ghost, which "guided them into all truth" in the one case, cannot be supposed to have suffered them to omit any thing essential, or to execute their task in a bungling

and imperfect manner, when putting the substance of the Christian faith upon record in their writings.

From the fact of being inspired, it follows that the Apostles, when they communicated any Christian truth by writing, did it by the aid of inspiration; and to this effect there are some express declarations. In the book of Revelation, St. John is commanded by the Spirit to *write*, ch. i. 10, 11; ii. 1, 8, 12, &c. xiv. 12; xxi. 5. St. Peter says, "This second epistle I WRITE—that ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the Apostles of the Lord and Saviour." 2 Epis. iii. 1, 2. St. John says, "that which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you;" and afterwards, as explanatory, adds, "these things I write," &c. 1 Ep. i. 3, 4; comp. ch. ii. 1, 12, 13, 14, 26; v. 13. St. Paul writes the things which he delivered to the Corinthians, and which he had "received of the Lord," 1 Cor. xi. 23. They did, therefore, commit some part of their preaching to writing. Now the intention of the Spirit in instigating them either to speak or to write, must have been, that they should communicate the truth, and in an intelligible manner; and this intention, Omnipotence could enable them to accomplish successfully in both speaking and writing.

Besides, the Scriptures present the only record we possess of our Saviour's miracles and discourses. How, then, is it possible, as Bp. Taylor argues, that they "should not contain all things necessary to salvation; when of all the words of Christ—in which, certainly, all things necessary to salvation must needs be contained, or else they were never revealed—there is not any one saying, or miracle, or story of Christ, in any thing that is material, preserved in any indubitable record, but in Scripture."* If, therefore, the record of the Lord's teaching be preserved in Scrip-

* Dissuasive from Popery, P. ii. l. i. § 2, p. 391. Mr. Newman fully acknowledges Scripture alone contains what remains to us of our Lord's teaching, and that tradition has no part in it. Proph. Office of the Church, Lect. xii.

ture alone, it must be for ever lost to us, unless Scripture be intelligible; and if our Lord's teaching, as revealed in Scripture, contain all things necessary to salvation, then we must infer the sufficiency of Scripture for life and salvation.

This is confirmed by the language of the Apostles themselves. St. Luke tells us, that he wrote his gospel that Theophilus "might know the *certainly* of those things wherein he had been instructed," i. 4. His gospel, then, is here declared to be a faithful record of the things relating to the religion of Christ, and sufficient to afford Theophilus a sure and certain knowledge of them; it must, consequently, be sufficient to afford the same certainty to all others who are able to consult it. St. John declares, "He that saw it bare record, and his record is true; and he knoweth that he saith true, *that ye might believe*," xix. 35: "These are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and *that believing ye might have life through his name*," xx. 31. The Evangelist here declares that he had written what is *necessary for faith*; which it could not be, unless what he had written was both intelligible, and sufficiently full for that purpose. That he is not speaking of works and miracles alone, but also of doctrines, is plain; for he declares it to be written, that "believing we might have life; through the name of Christ; which is, in fact, declaring it to be sufficient for producing a faith leading to eternal life.

Many things to the same purpose are found in the apostolical epistles. Thus to the Philippians, St. Paul says, "To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe," iii. 1; viz. makes you safe, because, as Macknight remarks, "having them in writing, they could examine them at their leisure, and have recourse to them as often as they had occasion;" which implies the intelligibility of what was written. To Timothy he says, "I WRITE these things, that thou mightest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God,"

1 Tim. iii. 14, 15; which knowledge his epistle was therefore designed and sufficient to impart. St. Peter's exhortation is, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God," 1 Ep. iv. 11; meaning that no doctrine or interpretation is to be advanced in opposition to the sacred Scriptures; a matter impossible to be decided, unless the "any man" spoken of be capable of comprehending them. St. John says, "These things write I unto you, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God," 1 Ep. v. 13; which surely declares the things written to be adequate for instruction in the faith.

In various passages the Word of God assures us, either directly or indirectly, of its own intelligibleness and sufficiency. Thus to the Israelites it is enjoined, "These words which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children," &c. Deut. vi. 6—8; comp. ch. xi. 8—21. Blessings are promised to them if they kept God's "commandments and his statutes which are written in the book of this law," Deut. xxx. 9, 10; which law was at stated periods to be read "before all the people in their hearing," that they might learn to fear the Lord, Deut. xxxi. 11, 13. The king was to write a copy of the law, in which he was to read, that he might learn to keep the divine statutes, Deut. xvii. 19;" comp. 1 Kings ii. 3; 2 Chron. xxxiv. 31. The Psalmist says, "The words of the Lord are pure words," Ps. xii. 6: "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple," Ps. xix. 7—11: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path," Ps. cxix. 105. The prophets exhort the people to have recourse "to the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them," Isa. viii. 20; comp. ch. xxxiv. 16; Mal. iv. 4.

Turning to the New Testament, the mind is forcibly struck with our Saviour's severe condemnation of the Jews,

who “transgressed the commandment of God,” and made it “of none effect by their traditions,” Matt. xv. 3, 6; Mark vii. 7. The traditions here spoken of, says the note in the Rhemish Testament, are such as “be either repugnant to God’s laws, or which at least be frivolous, unprofitable, and impertinent to piety and true worship.” The learned Allix is much of the same opinion; yet he contends for other traditions of a different description from those so severely condemned by our Lord, and advances many ingenious allegations in their support; but few of them have any solidity; and those which have, apply to Jewish testimony, not to a tradition of doctrines.*

If ever people had facilities for preserving tradition pure and uncorrupted, it was the Jewish nation. They had all the same language, and were bound by their institutions to have constant commerce among themselves, without mingling much with foreign nations. They had a specific code of laws in the books of Moses, and specific ordinances, which were to be performed in one place by one tribe and family; and external rites, however numerous, are more easily retained. Their belief was simple; and they had the continual and miraculous presence of God, together with a succession of prophets to teach and instruct them. Yet with all these advantages, their traditions became so corrupt as to merit the rebuke of our Lord; and surely he would not have denounced them so entirely, without any limitation whatever, if he had intended *any* tradition to be received in after-ages by his Church. His unqualified condemnation of tradition justifies us in rejecting it.

Again, we find our Saviour rebuking the Sadducees, “Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures;” which there-

* Judgment of the Ancient Jewish Church, ch. i.—iii. Dr. Hey well observes, “If we are to judge of tradition (i. e. whether it be repugnant to God’s laws, or frivolous) its authority is gone; that is, if we are only to adopt it when we think it useful.” Lect. in Divinity, l. iv. Art. vi. § 4. Forceible is the reasoning of Whitby: “Before we can know true tradition from false, we must know true faith from false; and if I must first know this faith, before I can know true tradition, I cannot need tradition to instruct me in the Christian faith.” Treatise of Tradition, p. i. p. 70

fore might have been known; that is, understood by them, if they had diligently used their reason in discovering the true sense of them, Matt. xxii. 29; comp. Mark xii. 24. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, Abraham says, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them;" which implies that they were capable of understanding them. Luke xvi. 29. When the lawyer asked our Lord, what was to be done in order to obtain eternal life, "he said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?" Luke x. 25, 26; and he often refers his hearers to the commandments, Matt. xix. 16; xxii. 35; all which would be a mockery, if they could not understand what they read. "Search the Scriptures," said he; "for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me," John v. 39; but this advice would have been useless, if they were not able to find, by such means as were in their power, the testimony which they gave to Christ. Nor, if we translate it, "Ye search the Scriptures," will it make any difference in this case; as our Lord will still refer to them as bearing testimony to himself; which they could not do, except they were, by themselves, intelligible writings.

In Acts xvii. 11, the Bereans are commended because they "searched the Scriptures daily, whether these things were so." St. Paul says to the Corinthians, "I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say," 1 Cor. x. 15, viz.: in what I am now writing to you, exercise your own judgment whether it be not true; which supposes that he was writing intelligibly to them. Again he tells them, "If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them," 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4; the plain import of which is, that the Gospel is so clear in all things necessary to make men Christians, that its light can only be hid from those whose minds are blinded by the god of this world; and, as the language is general, it must

be true of the Gospel written, as well as preached. The same Apostle says to Timothy, the holy Scriptures "are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine," &c., 2 Tim. iii. 15—17. These expressions fully declare the sufficiency of the Scriptures for instruction in "doctrine," and for rendering us perfect, "thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

Most of these texts, it is objected, speak of the Old Testament alone, and therefore, if understood exclusively, prove too much, as if the Old Testament alone was sufficient for salvation. But, even if only immediately referrible to the Hebrew volume, they evidently go the length of asserting its sufficiency as an intelligible law of faith and manners to those on whom it was bestowed. Immutability cannot change; omniscience cannot err; inspiration admits no imperfection; and if one part of the revealed word be perfect and sufficient for general edification, every other part must of necessity be the same. Now the New Testament, it is universally allowed, is a part of divine revelation; it is expressly denominated "Scripture" by apostolical authority, 2 Pet. iii. 16; and so must be possessed of those characters of perfection and completeness, which the sacred writers ascribe to the words of inspiration. It is a part of one grand scheme of revelation, designed to explain and complete the older one; a design which it could not fulfil unless it were in itself intelligible and complete.

But the objection proceeds upon a false foundation; for some, at least, of the texts above cited have a reference to the New Testament. St. Peter reckons the Epistles of St. Paul to be "Scripture." St. Paul calls upon the Corinthians to "judge" of what he addressed to them, which implies intelligibility in *his* communications. He declares that "the light of the glorious Gospel" is only hid to them whose minds are wilfully blinded, and asserts that "all

Scripture is given by inspiration;" or rather, "all Scripture is divinely inspired, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness;" which is a plain declaration that nothing is wanting in it; that it contains all necessary truths; and expressed so clearly, that men of ordinary capacities may by their own diligence, in conjunction with such helps as are within their reach, acquire a knowledge of them sufficient to "make them wise unto salvation;" since that which cannot, by itself, be so understood, can neither, by itself, be profitable for instruction, nor able to make men wise.

The volume of the New Testament closes with this denunciation, "If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book; and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life," &c., Rev. xxii. 18, 19. Supposing this denunciation to refer to the book of Revelation, it must *in principle* apply to all the productions of the inspired writers; all of which must, consequently, be both intelligible and sufficient as a revelation; otherwise no man could know whether he added to, or took away from, their words and meaning, or in any way violated the prohibition. The threat is in effect this: divine Scripture being vouchsafed, the severest punishment will be inflicted upon whomsoever will be so presumptuous as to alter or corrupt it; which implies its perfection.

Had it been the design of the Apostles to superadd to their writings a body of explanatory and supplemental doctrines for the guidance of the Church, some intimation would assuredly have been given in a matter so vastly important.* But so far from it, we meet, on the other hand, with many intimations, as well as express affirmations, that the apostolical writings are intended, and, consequently, are fitted for a complete rule of faith in after-ages. General perspicuity is essential to such a design. If they are dark,

* Bp. Van Mildert, Bampton Lect. iii. p. 71.

obscure, and enigmatical, the inspired authors have failed in their intended object; a supposition of revolting irreverence. It is inconsistent with the wisdom of God not to accomplish his own design; it is repugnant to his justice to require from men a faith which he has not clearly revealed to them; and it is opposed to his unfailing promise, that the Holy Spirit would "bring all things to their remembrance," and "guide them into all truth." Hence their writings must be a sufficiently full and clear communication, not needing any supplementary tradition to render them complete and intelligible; and being intended for perpetuity, they must retain the same character for ever.

From the examination which has now been made, it must be evident, that nothing like satisfactory scriptural evidence can be produced in support of the authority of tradition; while, on the contrary, the Scriptures attest their own sufficiency as an intelligible rule of faith and life; it would, therefore, be irrational to exalt tradition to an equality with them. Indisputably, it *may* be a useful aid in biblical interpretation; it *may* be a valuable *secondary* authority; but the scriptural evidence proves that it is not, like the New Testament itself, of apostolical origin.

CHAPTER V.

THE LEGITIMATE AUTHORITY OF TRADITION.

I. THE result of the foregoing inquiry is, THAT THERE IS NOT SATISFACTORY EVIDENCE TO PROVE THE APOSTOLICITY OF THE PUBLIC CREED, OR TRADITIVE DOCTRINE PROFESSED AND DELIVERED DOWN TRANSMISSIVELY IN THE PRIMITIVE CHURCHES.

And this is a conclusion of vast importance; since it de-

monstrates the folly and wickedness of presuming to place any traditionary instruction on a level with the holy Scripture. Of such guilt there is imminent danger whenever we confide in the apostolical origin of a tradition, and appeal to it as the test of religious truth. Though we may not profess, like the Romanists, to receive it with equal piety and veneration as the Scriptures; yet we profanely derogate from the distinctive and supreme authority of the latter, whenever we suffer *human* authority to arbitrate in matters of faith.*

Against this danger Protestant traditionists believe themselves secure, because they hold that Scripture is the source, the depository, and touchstone of divine truth; that tradition teaches, Scripture proves; that Scripture is to be interpreted by tradition, and tradition verified by Scripture. But how is the office here assigned to tradition compatible with the sovereign authority of Holy Writ? When the necessity of tradition is declared, it is at least inferentially declared that Scripture cannot be the touchstone of divine truth, *without* the application of another principle by which its real meaning is to be decided; which surely is the first step to the Romish dogma concerning Scripture and tradition as a *joint* rule of faith.

The Bible, being the word of God, whatever is either expressly declared therein, or may be proved thereby, must be regarded as infallible truth. This is universally admitted; and, accordingly, every system of religion claims to be founded on that basis. All the religious controversy, therefore, by which the world is distracted, turns upon this point; what is the right interpretation of Scripture? Now, however we may acknowledge in words the Bible to be the source and depository of saving truth, yet, if it once be admitted that the Bible is to be only understood in the sense fixed upon it by primitive antiquity, to primitive

* See the excellent remarks on this subject in Archbishop Whately's *Origin of Romish Errors*, chap. iv., and Hinds' *Inspiration and Authority of Scripture*, p. iii. § 7.

antiquity is ascribed, at any rate, an equal and co-ordinate authority, which is essentially Romanism.

Nay, something more is ascribed to it. That which is clear is invariably applied to elucidate that which is obscure; and so, by its very use and application, is invested with a certain degree of pre-eminence. Whatever has authority to ascertain the true meaning of disputed passages of Scripture, is necessarily invested with an authority above Scripture. It virtually arraigns the perfection of Scripture; and, moreover, implies that the true faith can be gathered from a source different from the Bible, and that, too, with more certainty and distinctness, inasmuch as it is made the criterion to determine what the doctrines are which the Bible contains. If primitive antiquity, therefore, has power to define the sense of Scripture, it becomes a rule of faith, and is in reality exalted to a superiority over the written word.

In the opinion of some, the popish tendency of the theory in question is obviated by the circumstance, that it appeals to early *written* tradition, whereas that which the Romish church receives is *oral*, vague, and unauthenticated.* True, it was once oral, but it is authenticated by the infallibility of the Roman church, and, therefore, can scarcely be called vague, however erroneous. But waving this, what difference is there in principle, whether written or unwritten? It is still tradition; the principle is conceded to the Romanists, when tradition is allowed to define the meaning of Scripture. Vincent of Lerins, the great patron of it among the ancients, declares that "it is extremely necessary, (*multum necesse est*,) that the limits of prophetic and apostolical interpretation be regulated according to the rule of the ecclesiastical and catholic sense;" which is sufficiently characteristic of the system; yet, if there be any meaning in words, it is identically the same with what the Romanist professes, when he adopts the creed of Pius IV., that "he will never interpret the

* Faber, on Calvinism, p. 9, note.

Scriptures otherwise than according to the unanimous consent of the Fathers.”

It is not meant to charge the advocates of the theory in question with popery; many of them are among the brightest ornaments of the church of England, as well as ablest defenders of Protestantism; and I feel grateful to them for their successful vindication, of what I believe to be fundamental doctrines of Christianity. It is the tendency of this particular principle which is here spoken of; and, it is my conviction, if primitive tradition be held up as coming from the Apostles in perfect purity, the next and inevitable step, if we honestly carry it through, in all its consequences, is to allow it at least an equal and independent authority with the Bible, and thence to receive it as constituting a part of the rule of faith.

From this danger we are guarded by the conclusion, to which we have arrived. Scripture only is inspired; Scripture only is infallible. Tradition is not to be regarded as apostolical and divine; and cannot, therefore, be allowed to share in the sovereign authority of inspired Scripture.

Such being the case, one or other of the opinions stated, as the *third* and *fourth* (ch. i. § 2, p. 9, 10,) must be adopted. Now the last, which totally disregards the voice of antiquity, need not detain us long. No person, who seriously reflects upon the subject, will deny that *some* weight is due to the religious creed of those who lived so near its source. The language in which the New Testament was written, was then a living language, widely disseminated, and well understood throughout the greatest part of the Roman empire. The early Christians also were familiar with the customs, manners, and modes of thinking, idioms, which enabled them to see clearly the meaning of many passages of Scripture, which have become obscure, by distance of time, and change of habits. Their writings then, from the very fact of their proximity to the time in which the New Testament was written, cannot fail to illustrate its diction and phraseology, to explain many rites and cus-

toms; while their professed belief supplies *some* evidence towards its exposition; and it is our duty to examine every kind of testimony which may contribute to elucidate the truths of religion.

As no solid reason can be advanced, for altogether repudiating primitive tradition, we must adopt the other alternative, and range ourselves along with those, who regard it as a *human*, but valuable attestation to the apostolic doctrine. The very arguments which forbid an implicit submission to its guidance not only allow, but enforce a reverent attention to its voice. It may be difficult to define the exact degree of authority to which, according to this theory, it is entitled, for on some points it affords more important testimony than on others; yet, in all cases, there is a medium between total rejection and making it the umpire in matters of dispute, and this medium we are bound to observe; wholly discarding its claims to *divine* authority, but conscientiously employing it as a valuable *human* evidence, as a most important witness among many others to the truth.

If no ancient ecclesiastical documents were now extant, the true sense of the sacred Scriptures, in all necessary articles of faith and practice, might be ascertained by the application of sound critical principles; but it may receive fresh light and confirmation by comparing it with the primitive belief. From this source much illustration may be drawn on certain doubtful and intricate points; while it yields additional assurance that the interpretation is right, when it is found to harmonize with that which was generally acknowledged and received in the first ages of Christianity. Thus antiquity forms one of the best and safest comments upon Scripture.

Of no moment would this comment be, if the Scriptures were plainly and unequivocally opposed to it. The Bible is the sole rule of faith, by which divine standard every doctrine is to be tried; but, considering the nature and constitution of the Christian church, the offices it was ordained

to serve, and the manner in which it fulfilled its high trust in the primitive times, there can scarcely be a stronger *collateral proof* of a Scriptural doctrine than its conformity with the traditionary teaching of the ancient church.

This is not claiming for the Church any infallibility, any absolute authority in biblical exposition; but merely regarding it as the witness and keeper of the truth, which may be gathered from the more authoritative evidence of Scripture itself. Scripture is the text, antiquity the comment; the former therefore is the rule, the latter only ministerial to its application.*

II. But to what extent are the ministerial services of primitive tradition to be carried in the business of interpretation? Some would seem, from their expressions, to admit it as a guide *universally* for the right interpretation of the Bible; others restrict it within certain limits. Now this important question cannot be decided, until it is determined what doctrines are included in primitive tradition, or that system of faith held in deposit by the church. The private opinions of the early Christians are not entitled to much greater regard than the private opinions of any other pious individuals; whereas the doctrines imbodyed in the public creed of the church form, as we have seen, a most valuable help to Scriptural interpretation; but it is no easy matter to ascertain in what this primitive creed consisted.

The only source of information is the testimony of the early Fathers, which testimony can only be come at by the process of criticism, applied to the interpretation of their writings; a business encumbered with great difficulties arising from the frequently involved style, the peculiar phrases and idioms, the various rhetorical figures, the many subtilties and distinctions, and obscure allusions with which they abound; and when the meaning is made

* "Antiquity," says Waterland, "ought to attend as a handmaid to Scripture, to wait upon her as her mistress, and to observe her; to keep off *intruders* from making too bold with her, and to discourage strangers from misrepresenting her." Imp. of Doctr. of the Trin. ch. vii.

out with sufficient clearness, the testimony they afford is not unfrequently vague and indefinite. In their ardour to refute heretics, they occasionally suppress the truth, and were often incautious both in their assertions and their reasonings: in their zeal to enforce the Christian doctrines, they frequently employ arguments extremely weak, and sometimes puerile; and in their Scriptural expositions often betray a great deficiency of critical judgment. Many of them held certain peculiar and erroneous opinions; and some of them even heretical notions; nor do the early Fathers treat of the leading articles of faith, with that strictness of definition, accuracy of method, and nicety of discrimination, which afterwards became necessary by the fierce controversies which arose successively in the church; while they often exhibit an indistinctness of ideas, and employ a laxity of phraseology, which renders it a matter of difficulty, to ascertain the exact nature of their belief.*

But as the principal authority due to them consists in the testimony they afford to the primitive belief, it may be said, that, whatever errors they may have fallen into, and whatever weaknesses they have shown, it does not materially diminish from their value as witnesses to the doctrines and discipline of the churches in their respective ages. This, to a considerable extent, must be admitted; yet, when viewed in this just light, there are some circumstances which operate as drawbacks upon their testimony.

It is often difficult to distinguish what they propound

* Every thing that can be urged *against* the Fathers, may be found in the Treatises of Daillé, Barbeyrac, Whitby, and Osburn, to which may be added Rosenmülleri Hist. Interp. Lib. Sac. Every thing that can be urged *for* them, in Scrivener, Apol. pro Patr.; Bossuet, *Defense de la Trad. et des Pères*; Bampton Lect. by Kett, Croft, Collinson, Heber, and Van Mildert; Thorndike, *De Rat. et Jur. Fin. Controv.* c. xxv.; Sherlock, *Pres. Sate of Soc. Controv.* ch. ii.; Berriman, *Serm. i. at L. Moyers*; Waterland, *Imp. of Doctr. of Trin.* ch. vii.; Cary, *Test. of the Fathers*, &c. Pref.; Ibbot, *Boyle's Lect.* second course, *serm. 4.*; Hey, *Lect. in Div.* v. i. p. 105; Beveridge, *Cod. Canon.*; Scultetus, *Medulla Patr.*; Le Clerc, *Epist. Crit. et Eccl. Ep. iv.*; Bp. Jebb, *Sermons*, Dodwell, *Diss. in Irenæum*; Dr. G. Sharpe, *Arg. in Def. of Christianity*, v. i. p. 183, et seq.; Reeves, *Pref. to Apol. &c.* Most of the writers on hermeneutics treat more or less upon the authority of the ancient Fathers.

as the public faith, and what they deliver as their private opinions. It is not enough to allege that such and such doctrines are maintained by several of the Fathers; for they may notwithstanding have been individual sentiments, not the recognised doctrine of the church. Before any of their statements can be admissible testimony to the received creed, it must be shown that the doctrines contained therein formed part of the publicly professed creed; in which there is often extreme difficulty, as they seldom clearly define, whether the opinions they advance are their own private sentiments, or the declared judgment of the church.

The difficulty is again heightened by the undeniable fact, that the Fathers are not unfrequently at variance with each other, and occasionally with themselves. If it be alleged that such differences relate to matters of individual opinion, not to the public creed, it assumes what ought to be proved, and what can be no easy task to prove, so long as any uncertainty exists, in distinguishing what they deliver as their own opinions, from what they record as being the ecclesiastical belief.

The paucity of ecclesiastical writings also, in the earlier ages of Christianity, must create some hesitation in deciding what was the actual belief in the primitive churches. After the apostolical Fathers, whose works are very brief, Justin Martyr is the earliest Christian writer, of whom any complete work has been handed down. Besides these, and some scanty fragments, we only possess the remains of some half-dozen ecclesiastical writers for the first two hundred years; and of these, some are very short productions, some spurious, some adulterated. Had we a competent number of genuine writings of those who conversed with the Apostles, or of their immediate scholars and successors, we might obtain an undoubted knowledge of the doctrines preached and believed in these ages, which is now hardly possible to be acquired from the few surviving documents. In the third century, they are more nume-

rous; but the value of their attestation to the primitive creed diminishes in proportion as they are removed from the apostolic age.*

These circumstances being taken into account, it can be no easy matter to arrive at any thing like certainty, as to what actually was the doctrine of the primitive churches. I do not say, it is impossible; but it must at least be quite as arduous a task as to determine what is the real doctrine of Scripture. If it be possible by a critical process to ascertain the former from the testimony of the ancient Fathers, it cannot fail to be equally possible to discover in the same way the latter from that of the sacred writers. We have quite as ample means of ascertaining the true sense of the latter as of the former; and to whatever degree of certainty we can arrive in the interpretation of Clemens or Justin Martyr, we may, at any rate, arrive at the same degree of certainty in the interpretation of St. James or St. Paul.

But the balance of evidence is very much in favour of the inspired writings. Manuscript copies of them are far more numerous, which afford facilities for ascertaining the genuine text; translations of them have been made into various languages from a very early period; public and reverent attention has been always directed to them; and they have been devoutly read, studied, and commented upon, in all ages, since their first appearance. In short, the critical helps for understanding the Bible, are vastly superior to those which are supplied for understanding any profane author. If then we can be as certain, probably more so, of the true sense of Scripture as of the Fathers, these latter cannot in reason be proposed to define and limit the meaning of Scripture.

The fact corresponds with what the preceding observations lead us to expect, that as much diversity of opinion

* Full information respecting the lives, writings, and editions of the Fathers is given by Walchius, *Biblioth. Patristica*; Schœnemann, *Biblioth. Patr. Lat.*; and by our countrymen, Cave and Lardner.

exists respecting the precise articles of the primitive creed, as respecting the genuine doctrines of Scripture. The Romanists are wont to discourse largely about it, as if it embraced the whole complex credenda of popery, which they believe has descended in an unbroken line from the Apostles. In defence of this position, they are often reduced to great straits; for, as Mr. O'Croly justly observes, "they argue very plausibly, when they speak in general terms, or argue in the abstract; but they are strangely perplexed when they come to particulars. They are utterly at a loss to specify any distinct tenet, or precept, or maxim, that was made the subject of revelation, distinct from the written word; so that when they come to details, every thing is vague, indefinite and uncertain."*

Protestants of course restrict it within narrower limits; yet they are at issue among themselves, as to its precise nature and extent. Some take it to include all that is professed in the public formularies of the church of England, and defend her entire doctrine and discipline by the example of the primitive ages. But this, it should seem, is too enlarged a view of it; for several subjects now eagerly debated were not so much as thought of by the ancient Christians. It is not perhaps going too far to assert, that the majority of questions controverted between Romanists and Protestants, between the church of England and dissenters, were never mooted in the primitive church. Some of them are not even mentioned in the yet remaining writings of the early Fathers, and some are touched upon merely incidentally.

Others, more cautious, represent the primitive creed, as comprising little more than the Apostles' creed. The author of the 71st No. of the Oxford Tracts says, "This majestic evidence (i. e. of the primitive church,) does not extend to any, but to the articles of the creed, especially those relating to the Trinity and Incarnation," and it is the main object of Mr. Newman's ninth and tenth lectures

* Difference between the two churches, p. 61.

to prove, that the Church's deposit of faith is substantially what is now called the creed, and that, "besides this, there is what may be called prophetic tradition," not of equal authority with the former. Such also appears to be the view of Professor Keble, in the postscript to his sermon on Primitive Tradition.

This last view of the subject derives probability from the nature of the case; for the professed belief of the church would embrace only fundamental truths; and no one diligently reading the Scriptures ever supposed them to be very numerous, though somewhat more so than what is comprehended in the summary creeds to be found in the ancient writers. As the church always exacted from persons to be baptized a profession of faith, and that, too, in the words of the creed, used by every church for the instruction of the catechumens,* such creed was necessarily very brief. But, still, whatever other doctrines might also be maintained, those only which were held to be the essentials of the Christian faith, would be publicly recognised and transmitted from hand to hand, as the good deposit delivered to them by the Apostles. And such is the fact, as appears from the researches of the ablest investigators of Christian antiquity.

Without attempting an enumeration of them, which is not required by the present work, it may just be observed that what were accounted fundamentals by the primitive churches correspond with what are so regarded by the church of England. The blessed Trinity, the incarnation and atonement of Christ, the sanctification of the Spirit, the canon of Scripture, the holy Catholic Church, the three-fold order of ministers, the apostolical succession, the grace of the sacraments, infant baptism, baptismal regeneration, justification, and life everlasting; these, at least, were included in the primitive creed. The evidence for all of them is not, I own, equally strong; and all of them may not have been required for the admission of members

* Bingham, *Antiq. lib. xi. c. vii. § 8.*

into the church by baptism; but these were esteemed the primary articles, were publicly professed, and handed down as the traditionary doctrines of the church.

It will now be easy to answer the question concerning the extent to which primitive tradition is useful in biblical interpretation. It can only apply to such passages of Scripture which relate to those leading articles of faith which formed the recognised creed in the primitive ages. On other points, antiquity may supply a certain degree of evidence, but on those alone have the churches officially spoken. Those, alone, have been ecclesiastically declared to be the doctrines of Scripture, to be necessary to be believed by all for salvation; and, by consequence, the primitive church sanctions with her authority that interpretation of the Scriptures, and that alone, which is in conformity with them.

The utility of primitive tradition thus consists in proposing great doctrinal landmarks for direction to the sense of Scripture generally, rather than in the exposition of particular passages. It has been said, indeed, that "in numerous cases," the church sets her seal upon one among many possible expositions of particular texts;* but they cannot, in the nature of things, be numerous, for the representation given by Wiseman of the Roman, is applicable to the ancient Catholic church, "The church decides the dogma, and in some, though few instances, has decided the meaning of texts; but, generally speaking, it leaves the discussion of individual passages to the care of theologians, who are not at liberty to adopt any interpretation which is not strictly conformable to the dogma defined."†

The sanction of the church can only be pleaded when she has actually spoken out, whether concerning doctrines or interpretations. It is to no purpose, therefore, to denounce the ancient Fathers as worthless expounders of Scripture. Their expository attempts may abound in ig-

* Keble, Sermon on Trad. p. 36.

† Lectures on the Eucharist, p. 35.

norance, in puerility, in absurdity, in contradiction; and he who shall deny this, is "in antiquitate plane hospes;" Whitby's *Dissertatio de SS. Interp.* will supply ample proof; but they alone are answerable for their own delinquency. It does not attach to the traditionary doctrine which rests, not on this or that doctor, but on the church Catholic; and, as it cannot be supposed that the true faith was materially perverted so soon after its rise, the consent of the primitive church on all essential articles of religion, where her judgment has been distinctly pronounced, and can be plainly ascertained, must be admitted as strong corroborative evidence of the right interpretation of the Scriptures.

Such being the case, primitive tradition, as now limited and explained, ought to be diligently consulted by the conscientious inquirer into Scripture truth; not as being the foundation of doctrine, not as THE test of orthodoxy, not as itself DIVINE and INFALLIBLE in exposition; but as one of the best helps which the Almighty hath vouchsafed to his creatures for ascertaining the truths of revelation.

III. The testimony of the primitive church, besides its utility in biblical interpretation, is of considerable importance for the refutation of Romanists, and modern schismatics.

The Romanists hold that every one of their peculiar dogmas was preached by the Apostles, has been unanimously taught by the Fathers, has been handed down by an invariable tradition, and has been always received by the universal church of Christ. Now here, it is argued, is an asserted fact, capable of being proved or disproved by competent evidence. If it can be shown by clear and undoubted testimony, that the peculiar doctrines of the church of Rome were not received by the primitive church, the very foundation upon which the Romanists take their stand is subverted, and they are refuted on their own ground.

Unavoidable as this conclusion may seem, the Romanists

are too wily adversaries to be so easily discomfited. It is true, they with one voice agree in asserting the fact; and the asserted fact, it is obvious, must be substantiated by evidence before any rational being can embrace it. Both Protestants and Romanists demand historical testimony, and agree that it is to be sought in the remaining documents of ecclesiastical antiquity. But here is the point from whence they diverge. The former will abide by this testimony, when fairly weighed in the balance of a sound and impartial judgment; the latter, also, admit it as sufficient evidence, but only when it is pronounced to be so by holy mother church, to whom it belongs to declare what is conformable or contrary to Scripture and tradition; for they are bound to receive with implicit credence all her decisions, so long as they believe her to be infallible.

Futile, therefore, is the imagination that nothing more is required for the conversion of Roman Catholics than to meet them on the ground of the alleged fact, that their doctrines and practices have continued in every age, and without any variation, from the beginning, and to refute it by counter-evidence. Satisfactory as such a course may be to unprejudiced minds, with Romanists how can it suffice, when, as they believe, it belongs to the jurisdiction of their infallible church to declare what is the evidence of antiquity, and what the sense of Scripture, on all matters of religion? An intelligent inquirer after truth demands such evidence as satisfies his reason, and to that he assents; but with the obsequious sons of Rome it is sufficient to hush every doubt, and to silence all opposition, to reply "*Roma locuta est; causa finita est;*" since she has a paramount authority in interpreting both Scripture and tradition.*

On this principle it is easy to account for the inconsistency with which Roman Catholics are charged, in pro-

* Dr. Trevern says, "The same judge, the same interpreter that unfolds to us the sense of the divine books, manifests to us also that of tradition." *Discus. Amic. Lett. v.* See also Bevington and Kirk, *Faith of Catholics*, Prop. ix.

fessing the profoundest reverence for the ancient Fathers, and nevertheless often rejecting their testimony.* Many of them, especially of them who flourished in the first three or four centuries after Christ, abound in passages too decidedly hostile to the Romish dogmas to be explained away by any artifice or ingenuity. Their testimony, in such cases, must be given up; for which, assuming the truth of their creed, there are good grounds. Infallibility cannot err; and whatever is contrary to its decisions must be abandoned as untrue.

On the same principle, also, we may account for an evident indisposition in Roman Catholics of the present age to dwell much upon the authority of tradition. The Council of Trent having decreed it to be received and venerated, they are necessitated to acknowledge it; but they usually speak of it in general terms, and scarcely ever come to particulars, or adduce it as the basis of any doctrine. Mr. O'Croly, who must be allowed to have ample means of information, asserts, that "Catholic divines themselves have virtually given up this point; have abandoned the unwritten word as a mere phantom of the imagination. They endeavour, now to establish all the principal points of their religion by the authority of the written word."† He who will compare the older with the more recent Romish controvertists will acknowledge this statement not to be far wide of the truth. They are too skilful not to perceive, that, if they depend upon primitive tradition, victory will rush into the arms of their opponents; for which reason they bend their whole strength to establish, and that, too, chiefly on Scripture grounds, the powers and privileges of the church; well knowing, that if a divine authority can be proved to be constantly resident within her for determining all matters of faith, her children must submissively receive whatever she propounds concerning the written or unwritten word, and concerning its interpretation.

* Daille, *De Usu Patr.* p. ii.; Stillingfleet, *Rational Account of the Grounds*, p. i. c. v.; Taylor, *Introd. to p. ii. of Dissuasive*; Newman, *Proph. Office*, Lect. ii.

† *Difference between the Two Churches*, p. 62.

From this position, on which every Romanist must necessarily take his stand, how is he to be dislodged? Assail him with scriptural texts, the meaning of which is established by the most undeniable confirmation of philological criticism, he can only receive them "according to that sense, which holy mother church, to whom it appertains to judge of the true meaning and interpretation of the sacred Scriptures, hath holden and still holds."* Produce before him the most unquestionable evidence of primitive tradition, he can only admit those apostolical and ecclesiastical traditions of which the church is at once the depository and the interpreter. Though professing to build his faith on scripture and tradition, he receives them only as holy mother church "does hold" them, to whom he is bound to yield unconditional submission. Thus his creed, so inconsistent in itself, pretends to bow to the sacred Scriptures, and to reverence catholic antiquity, while in effect it nullifies every appeal to them.

So long as Romanists remain within the intrenchment of an unerring church, they will laugh at every argument which Protestants can bring against them; and the only way in which they can be attacked successfully is by an assault upon the intrenchment itself. It is not necessary now to inquire how this is to be effected; but the fortress of church supremacy must first be carried, the phantom of infallibility must first be dispelled, and then their eyes will be open to the perception of evangelic truth; then, and not till then, will they perceive the mighty evidence which primitive tradition presents against the peculiarities of the church of Rome.

IV. In the refutation of schismatics, Christian antiquity is also of some value. Those who were but little removed from the time of the Apostles could scarcely be entirely ignorant of any of the divine truths delivered to their custody; and therefore, when a doctrine totally unknown to the primitive church is preached in a subsequent age, that

* Creed of Pius IV.

very circumstance forms a fair presumption of its falsehood. In this manner the ancient Fathers argued, deeming it an insuperable objection to any novel doctrine, that it formed no part of the creed which had come down to them. If it were a genuine apostolical doctrine, it would be strange not to find it believed and maintained in the early catholic church, and never to have been heard of till a time long posterior; and hence the fact of its newness implies that it has not been revealed and recommended by the inspired authors of Christianity.

This is admitted by the sternest enemies of the Fathers, as Whitby, Daille, &c., and it forms an argument against all novelties in religion; but it is only a negative one, and can never weigh against direct and positive evidence. It is likewise built upon the presumption that the primitive belief was universally orthodox, and so can have no more force than this presumption. Moreover, it is of very limited application. There is scarcely any doctrinal error, any heresy, the origin of which may not be traced to a very early period. The various existing sects and denominations have their counterpart in former ages; and though their jarring tenets may not have been fully broached, yet the principles may be discerned, which at length attained their full growth and maturity. It would be difficult to point out many erroneous tenets wholly unknown to the primitive Christians; but so far as this negative argument can be applied, it is valid; and it is a sufficient reason for rejecting all such novelties, and the Scriptural interpretation upon which they are founded, that their existence is not discoverable in primitive tradition.

V. Notwithstanding these beneficial results, it may still be argued, that, admitting the view of primitive tradition which reduces it merely to an auxiliary in religious matters, we are left without any AUTHORITATIVE GUIDE in our inquiries, without any STANDARD by which to try the many contradictory interpretations of Scripture. This, it is acknowledged, is the inevitable consequence; but let it be

inquired, whether there *can* be an infallible guide, and whether it *would serve* the purpose better.

The Romanists argue that the rule of faith appointed by Christ must be certain and unerring, and therefore that there must be some permanent and infallible guide.* But how shall frail man presume to determine what conduct the Deity must pursue in vouchsafing a revelation to his creatures? Many things may seem fit and useful, which yet have been differently ordered by divine Providence. To those who are familiar with the reasoning of Chillingworth and Butler, it will appear a most fallacious mode of argument to conclude, that the course of God's dealings with men will be what human reason might antecedently expect. It is setting up the narrow span of a fallible understanding to be the measure of infinite wisdom. However necessary to the perfection of revealed religion it may appear to have an acknowledged authority for the settlement of all disputes, we are not justified in concluding that Providence has given one to mankind.

But it is thought to be incredible that the Deity, in granting a revelation, would leave its meaning to be ascertained by so weak and erring a tribunal as private judgment. Experience shows that sincere Christians have been led by the exercise of it to the most opposite conclusions, all sects and denominations claiming with equal pertinacity the support of Scripture for their conflicting systems; that, however satisfactory each party may deem their own particular views of Scripture, they are mere private, unauthorized opinions, and cannot demand admission from others; that an appeal to Scripture is practically useless for deciding controversies, since the meaning itself of Scripture is the very matter litigated; that no *proof* can be assigned which among the innumerable and clashing views is the true one; that private judgment, in short, will vary according to the varied conditions, humours, and ca-

* Milner, End of Relig. Controv. Lett. v. viii.

pacities of men; and consequently that religious controversy must, on this principle, be interminable.

Supposing the fact to be, as here stated, that evils unavoidably spring from the exercise of private judgment in religion, yet we are not therefore warranted to infer, that there must be some unquestionable umpire, which has a right to decide, and to whose decisions the conflicting parties are bound to submit. Before such an inference can be fairly impressed upon us, it must be shown that the Deity, in granting a revelation, *designed* to preclude the possibility of dispute as to its meaning. And, as disputes can only be prevented by taking away the liberty of judgment, it must further be shown that the Deity also *designed* to deprive men of this freedom, to oblige them to take their religion upon trust, and to compel them to receive with implicit submission what some recognised arbiter shall impose. But we cannot know what the Deity intended in regard to religion otherwise than from what he has done; and since perfect unanimity has never yet been the result among those to whom his will has been revealed, we are authorized to conclude, that he did not *design* to prevent the evils of controversy by a living infallible guide.

But such a design, it is alleged, may be inferred from the numerous exhortations in Scripture to be all of one mind and judgment. In none of these passages, however, is there any intimation of an instituted arbiter in religious disputes, of any certain mode of effecting a perfect unanimity. The practice of virtue is as binding, and is as frequently inculcated in Scripture as the maintenance of unity; yet the Almighty has not imposed any compulsory restraint from the commission of vice; and why should it be thought that God has appointed a special preventive against error and contention in matters of faith.

A coercive power of this kind is incompatible with the present constitution of man. It belongs to a rational being to deliberate and judge for himself; and the exercise of

this privilege cannot co-exist with a compulsory submission to any tribunal. To compel man to surrender his judgment to that of another, would be to reduce him from the rank of an intelligent creature to a mere automaton, to be moved about by external direction, without any inward principle of rationality.

The understanding is so framed that it cannot be compelled to the belief of any thing by outward force. It may make men hypocrites, but cannot produce conviction. The mind is an active principle, which will think and judge; to debar it of this liberty is impossible; for it can no more help forming its decision on every thing subjected to it by the light of reason, than the eye can help seeing external objects by the light of the sun. As no power can deprive man of this faculty of judgment,—a faculty which, while his understanding remains, he naturally and necessarily exercises,—he cannot, if he would, conform his belief to the dictates of another.

The fundamental verities of religion rest purely on the exercise of our own reason. On no other ground can we believe in the existence of a God. It cannot be on the credit of the sacred Scriptures; because we cannot believe them to be divine, without first believing that there is a God from whom they proceed. Our conviction of this great truth is derived solely from the conclusions of our reason; and if the Deity has given us no other guide but reason, with the assistance of his grace, to a belief in himself, what more certainty can be required in regard to other truths of religion?

As human nature is constituted, it is impossible to arrive at greater certainty. Since we cannot be more sure of any thing than we are of the truth of the reasons upon which we believe it, an infallible guide would give no additional security. For on what must our persuasion of his existence depend? On the Scriptures? But this would be to admit that we can rightly interpret them without his aid. On the deduction of reason? But if we may rely upon our

reason for discovering the existence of an infallible judge, we may rely upon it for discovering the true sense of Scripture. On Scripture and reason? Then they must be allowed to be fit means to decide all other controverted points as well as this. If we believe in such a judge, we must have some evidence for it, such as will satisfy the judgment; so that all at last still recurs upon our own judgment.

Supposing, again, the existence of an infallible guide, unless we were infallible, we might misunderstand his doctrine, and mistake his decisions. "No man can be more certain of the decisions of an infallible judge, than he is of his infallibility; and, therefore, if he have not an infallible certainty of the infallibility of the judge, he cannot have an infallible certainty that he defines infallibly."* Romanists, then, cannot have greater certainty respecting the doctrines of their infallible church, than Protestants have respecting the doctrines which they deduce from the Scriptures. Both must depend alike upon their own reason; the former, for understanding the decrees of his church, and the latter, for understanding the truths of the Bible.

The free use of the reason and judgment cannot, moreover, be superseded, without destroying human responsibility. If there was an infallible preservative against error, a right belief could be no matter of choice; and if there was an irresistible safeguard against vice, obedience could be no virtue. In the divine government of the world, men are treated as free agents; in what relates to their moral conduct, they are left to the freedom of their own wills; and salvation being every man's own concern, they are and must be left to judge for themselves, what they ought to believe and practise to this end; otherwise they could not be accountable for their conduct.† They

* Sherlock, *Disc. concerning a Judge in Controversies*, p. 53. See the admirable reasoning of Leslie, *Case stated between the Church of Rome and England*, in *Works*, vol. i. p. 497.

† "He that will choose a religion for me, and will not suffer me to choose for myself, ought to be punished for me too, if I miscarry through his choice." Ibbot, *Sermons at Boyle's Lect.* p. 249.

may err, and involve themselves in eternal ruin; but liability to error is inseparable from a state of probation; and hence an infallible guide in matters of faith and practice, would be incompatible with the exercise of a rational faith, and with a moral submission to the laws of God.

In perfect harmony with these deductions of reason are the declarations of Holy Writ. It no where tells us that God has ordained any living infallible guide in the church.* Though our Lord and the Apostles were infallible, they never urge their own infallibility for compelling men's faith; on the other hand, they address mankind as intelligent creatures, and invite them to examine and judge of the truth of what they propound. Our Saviour recommended to all the use of private judgment: "Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?" Luke xii. 57; and appeals to their reason, whether the miracles which he performed were not adequate proofs of his Messiahship, John x. 37, 38. He bids his hearers search the Scriptures, John v. 39; and reproaches the Jews for not making a proper use of their reason: "Ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?" Matt. xvi. 3; which plainly implies the exercise of judgment in order to discern.

In the same manner the Apostles appealed to the judgment of their disciples, endeavouring to convince their understandings, and applauding those who "searched the Scriptures, whether these things were so," Acts viii. 23. As, for instance, St. Peter and St. Paul laboured to persuade the people concerning Jesus by arguments taken from the law and the prophets, Acts ii. 22; xxviii. 23. "I speak as unto wise men, judge ye what I say," 1 Cor. x. 15. "Judge in yourselves," xi. 13. "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith: prove your own selves," 2 Cor. xiii. 5. "Prove all things; hold fast that which

* See Prideaux, *Fasciculus*, p. 39. The text in Luke xiv. 23, "Compel them to come in," only means, urge them with the most pressing entreaties. See *Christian Expositor*, in loc.

is good," 1 Thess. v. 21. "Be ready to give an answer to every man that asketh a reason of the hope that is in you," 1 Pet. iii. 15. "Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits," 1 John iv. 1.

Throughout the Scriptures religion is represented as a personal affair, on which every man is to be "fully persuaded in his own mind," Rom. xiv. 5; "must bear his own burden," Gal. vi. 5; and must "give an account of himself to God," Rom. xiv. 12; "who will render to every man according to his deeds," Rom. ii. 6. In these and similar texts it is implied that believers are to use their reason on the subject of religion, to inquire into the matters proposed by their teachers, to examine the evidence in confirmation of Christ being the Son of God, and the claims of the Apostles to be his delegated ambassadors. They are, in, short, "to prove all things," to try and examine all opinions, doctrines, testimonies; and, having done so, to "hold that which is good," 1 Thess. v. 21; all which is quite inconsistent with the notion that Christians are to deliver up their judgment to the direction of spiritual guides.

Were it possible to rebut this overwhelming evidence, the farther question would remain to be decided, where this infallible tribunal is to be found, whether in the Romish communion, in general councils, in the ministerial order, in primitive tradition, or elsewhere. The members of the church of Rome seem to think it enough to produce some arguments, which, at best, are merely plausible, to prove the necessity of an authoritative judge in religion; but this will not satisfy her opponents, who not only require to be shown, by sufficient evidence, that there is an unerring guide, but is also divinely appointed WITHIN the Romish communion. They farther require to be shown, by sufficient evidence, *in whom* this divine attribute of infallibility resides; whether in the pope, the cardinals, the bishops, general councils, &c.; a point which, though an essential one, the Romish church has never infallibly de-

terminated, and never can; for as infallibility can alone infallibly decide, such a determination by the church would be to assume its own infallibility.*

To propose the consent of primitive antiquity, as the all-authoritative guide in articles of faith, is to invest with infallibility that which the preceding investigation has shown *not* to be divine, and so not fit for the office.

Hence, an infallible guide in religion is in the nature of things impossible. So long as the intellect of man is an active principle, and his will is free, varieties of opinion, doubts and divisions, schisms and heresies will inevitably arise; and no power can entirely repress them without subverting the constitution of the human mind. Nor where this phantom of infallibility has been pretended, has it been effectual. Within the pale of Rome there has been as much controversy and dispute, as vast a mass of heterogeneous opinions, parties and persuasions, as where liberty of judgment has been freely granted.

It is clear, then, that if the evils of private judgment in religion are as great as the Romanists represent them, they cannot find a remedy in the supposition of an infallible judge in disputed points. The Creator has permitted their existence; and, consequently, they form part of his plan of providential government, in which he has permitted the introduction of evil into the world; a plan mysterious, indeed, yet we may rest assured, the wisest and the best.

VI. The exercise of private judgment in religion is an unalienable right; and any attempt to shackle it by any pretence, as by imposing an infallible guide in controversies, is a daring violation of natural liberty, is inconsistent with the condition of man as a rational and responsible being, and is opposed to many express declarations in the sacred writings. Religion is a reasonable service, and, as such, is a matter on which the understanding must be en-

* See the convincing reasoning of Archbishop Bramhall, Works, p. 39. et seq., and of Leslie, Works, vol. i. p. 495, et seq.

gaged. Divine revelation neither destroys the faculties, nor implants new ones; though it imparts the knowledge of some things not discoverable by them; and by the very constitution of nature, men must use their rational faculties in spiritual as well as in temporal concerns.

From this liberty of thought and of free inquiry, some diversity of opinion will inevitably arise; but though perfect unanimity may, in the present state of things, be as unattainable as perfect virtue in practice, it is, like virtue, a commanded duty, and should be sought by every effort in our power. What, then, are the means which Providence has granted for promoting it? This is a question of so much importance as to deserve a serious consideration.

Rejecting, as we must, both the dream of papal infallibility, and the theory which erects primitive tradition into the Standard of Scripture truth, there may nevertheless be what may properly be called guides, invested with a certain degree of authority. We may reasonably solicit the help and guidance, and listen to the instructions of those, to whom we do not allow the delegated power to judge and decide for us. Such application for *help* is a very different thing from bowing to the dictates of an infallible umpire, without examination and judging for ourselves; and is therefore compatible with the liberty of private judgment.

Some helps and guides are absolutely necessary; for no man can, by his own unassisted powers, attain a knowledge of every thing pertaining to revelation; and must, in some degree, depend upon the researches and conclusions of others. The Bible is a collection of records relating to the divine economy, composed by different authors, in different ages, and in different tongues; embracing a great variety of subjects, historical, prophetic, poetical, ethical; written on several occasions, and in various styles. The proofs that this collection of writings is the word of God; that they have come down to us entire and uncor-

rupt; that the languages in which they are written can now be understood, though long ceased to be spoken; that they are truly translated into the vernacular tongues; that any particular church has correctly interpreted their meaning—open into too wide a field for any single mind to traverse. No individual, however highly gifted, can without foreign aid examine and weigh the grounds of his assent to these positions; in some points, more or less, he *must* rely upon the judgment of those, who have made each of them the subject of their particular study. All, therefore, the learned and the unlearned, have need of guidance, though in different degrees; and may say with the Ethiopian eunuch, “How can I (understand them) except some man should guide me?”

1. Such guides a gracious Providence hath mercifully vouchsafed in the LIGHT OF REASON, the TEACHING OF THE CHURCH, and the ILLUMINATION OF THE SPIRIT. By “the light of reason,” is meant the exercise of our natural faculties, and the employment of all the external means afforded by literature and science, for the investigation of truth. These are requisite for attaining any branch of knowledge, and for understanding any production of learning and genius. They are equally so for gaining a knowledge of revealed truth; for the Deity, in condescending to use a language as the vehicle of communication, clearly intended it to be understood as all other communications in the same language; else it would not be a vehicle of intelligence to man. Holy Scripture was given for the instruction of all mankind, all mankind, therefore, are bound to reverence it, to study it, and to use their best reason for understanding the true sense of it. This, though the especial privilege of the learned, is the duty of all according to their several abilities and opportunities.

The two other GUIDES are alike necessary, and alike accessible to all, who by their assistance may attain to a saving knowledge of the truths of revelation. Whatever belongs to the *first*, is detailed in the hermeneutic treatises,

of which Horne's Introduction is the best and most comprehensive for students, and the abridgment of it for general readers. On the *second* and *third*, a few observations may be proper.

2. To believe in the holy catholic church forms a prominent article in the established creed of this country; and, in another publication, I have fully discussed its nature and constitution.* It is necessary, however, to illustrate the true character of the church as a guide in religion, to dwell a little upon the offices assigned to her by the great Founder and Head, Jesus Christ, of preserving the Scriptures, and of dispensing the truths they contain.

The Apostles, before their removal from the world, left in writing a faithful record of the religion which they first established by preaching; but this record would have been useless unless means had been at the same time provided for attesting the genuineness and sacred authority of it. The church was instituted by our Lord to be "the witness and keeper of holy writ," which necessarily includes the office of teaching the doctrines and duties which it enjoins. Nor could she be "the pillar and ground of the truth," unless she were invested with the power and ability, not only to preserve, but likewise to inculcate the Gospel truth. Christianity, as contained in the Scriptures, is a system of faith and practice requiring instruction for its propagation in the world; and as the Apostles promulgated it by word of mouth as well as by writing, so the church was appointed to supply in some measure their place, by teaching the same to her members, as well as by putting the Scriptures into their hands.

The total absence of systematic arrangement in the Scriptures, and the indirect manner in which the most essential doctrines of Christianity are taught there, imply, that they were designed to be accompanied with some instruction in order to general edification;† and the constitution of be-

* Vindication of Church Establishments, P. ii.

† Hawkins, Diss. on Unauthor. Tradition.

lievers into a visible society shows, that the office of imparting this instruction is intrusted to its governors, guardians, and pastors.

This is farther apparent from the appointment of a perpetual succession of a ministerial order in the church. By a divine commission our Lord delegated to the Apostles the holy office of proselyting all nations, of baptizing them, and teaching them to observe whatsoever he had commanded, Matt. xxviii. 20; and the same office descends by delegation to their successors, the bishops and pastors, who are to be, in perpetual succession, the inspectors, guardians, governors, and instructors of the church, Luke xxii. 26; 1 Cor. xii. 28; 1 Tim. iii. 5; 1 Pet. v. 2. That good deposit which they had received they are to commit "to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also," 2 Tim. ii. 2. Those who have received this commission are to take heed "to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made them overseers," Acts xx. 28; to be "able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers," Tit. i. 9; to reject heretics, Tit. iii. 10; and they were invested with spiritual powers and privileges to qualify them for the execution of their important duties; Christ having engaged to succour them by his Spirit, and to aid them by his abiding presence to the end of the world. Thus the church is ordained a visible, though spiritual society, with a constituted form of ecclesiastical government, the perpetuity of which is guarantied by especial promise.*

Such a constitution was evidently intended to be the means of preserving the Christian religion, and of disseminating the knowledge and practice of it among mankind. For this purpose those who are ordained to the ministry are to acquire a deep knowledge of revealed truth, to qualify them for imparting it effectively to the people. They are to be "teachers," 1 Cor. xii. 28; Ephes. iv. 11; to "give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine," 1 Tim.

* Matt. xvi. 18; xxviii. 20; John xv. 16; xvi. 13; xx. 21, 23; 1 Tim. iii. 15; Ephes. iv. 11, 14; Isaiah lix. 21.

iv. 13; to "labour in the word and doctrine," 1 Tim. v. 17; to "rightly divide the word of truth," 2 Tim. ii. 14; to "preach the word, to reprove, rebuke, exhort," 2 Tim. iv. 2; to be "mighty in the Scriptures," Acts xviii. 24; to be "apt to teach," 1 Tim. iii. 2; to be "an example of the believers in word—in faith," 1 Tim. iv. 12; all which plainly intimates, that they are to be possessed of the requisite qualifications to explain the doctrines which they themselves have learned, and to recommend them to the belief and practice of mankind.

The Christian ministry was not ordained for this purpose alone. To them, also, belongs the duty of officiating in divine services, of administering the sacraments, and setting in order the things that are wanting in the churches. But it is one department of their office to preserve the sacred deposit of the truth, to initiate the young and the ignorant in the rudiments of their faith, to feed those who "have need of milk, and not of strong meat;" to declare the deeper doctrines of religion "to them that are of full age," able to bear strong meat, Heb. v. 13, 14; 1 Cor. iii. 2; to be as "faithful and wise stewards, whom their Lord shall make rulers over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season," Luke xii. 42. By this means ample provision is made to supply the wants of all, to communicate spiritual instruction to every class of believers, and to "present every man perfect in Christ Jesus," Col. i. 28. As every art and science may be taught by competent masters, so these "masters in Israel" are ordained to be the teachers of religion; an office, consequently, which none have authority to take upon themselves, except those "who are called of God," who derive their commission by an unbroken succession from the Apostles.

The church, then, as the depository and dispenser of the Christian doctrine, is bound to teach it to her members, and to inculcate it to the utmost possible extent, and by every mode likely to be most effectual. She has, therefore, the right, and it is her duty, to propound what in her judgment is the true faith; to embody it in articles,

creeds, and catechisms; to ordain a public form of worship; to decree rites and ceremonies; to enforce discipline; and, in short, to do whatever, in subordination to Christ, may best promote the great objects of her institution. In this way the church has authority in controversies of faith; and to this extent it may be exercised.

In the execution of this high office the church enjoys the promised protection and supporting grace of her divine Founder. We may, consequently, on good grounds believe that, as well in the interpretation of Scripture, as in the inculcation of articles of faith, she is assisted by a due measure of the Spirit. Less than this cannot be inferred from our Lord's declaration, "Lo! I am with you, even unto the end of the world;" which conveys an assurance that Christ will be continually present with his church, with the bishops and pastors, who derive their commission by an uninterrupted succession from the Apostles; and the abiding presence of our Saviour will ever be made manifest by special help and grace.

The powers and privileges with which the church catholic is invested, necessarily attach to every sound branch of the same, the doctrinal instruction of which must be regarded as infallibly true, so long as it continues a sound branch of the universal church. But, here, the great difficulty occurs. Some churches have erred, and all within our knowledge by possibility may; how, then, is it to be known whether any particular church is a real and veritable section of the church catholic? It may be replied, by possessing the distinguishing characteristic of such a church, namely, that it teaches the apostolical doctrine, and follows the apostolical practice. Well: but how is this to be proved? The church's testimony cannot be received as legitimate evidence, when its own claims are in question; and since primitive tradition is not THE test, the only medium of proof is a comparison of its doctrines with the acknowledged writings of the Apostles; which, as there is no infallible guide to direct us, must necessarily be determined

by the private judgment of men. But in this there is an explicit acknowledgment, that any particular church may err; that there is a standard above it by which its claims are to be tried; and that this standard, the Holy Scriptures, is the vehicle of infallible truth.

Discarding all vain pretensions to infallibility, and all attempts to shackle mental liberty, every particular branch of the universal "church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth," is to be, to the best of her judgment, the keeper and expounder of true religion. Of this the only *divine* foundation is the word of God; but at the same time a reverent attention is to be paid to Christian antiquity; for particular churches, as well as individual believers, are bound not to neglect the legitimate use of primitive tradition. While faith is built alone upon Scripture, it is no small confirmation of its orthodoxy to be conformable with that which the holy catholic church throughout all the world doth acknowledge.

It is the duty and privilege of each separate church, as the keeper and expounder of the truth, to declare in creeds, articles, and public formularies, what she conceives to be the true faith, and to require a profession of belief in it as the condition of communion with her. Not that she is herein infallible; not that she exercises any independent power; she can only lawfully act in strict submission to Christ, the head of the church; and so in entire subordination to the infallible authority of Scripture, by which both the truth of her creed, and the fitness of her instructions are to be tried and examined.

The privilege assigned to the church, of being the guardian and teacher of the faith, implies a corresponding obligation, on the part of her children, to listen to her voice. The duties of preceptor and pupil are reciprocal; and, as it is the office of the church to teach, it is also the duty of the people to receive her teaching with the deference due to her high functions. She teaches partly by prescribing public forms of worship and formularies of faith, and partly

by the instrumentality of her ministers; but in whatever way her instructions are offered, they are means appointed by our Lord for the propagation of his religion, and should, for that reason, be heard with attention and respect by all who are desirous of spiritual edification. "Obey them that have the rule over you," Heb. xiii. 17. "Remember them who have the rule over you, who have spoken to you the word of God, whose faith follow," Heb. xiii. 7. "We beseech you, brethren, to know them who labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love, for their work's sake," 1 Thess. v. 12: comp. ch. iv. 8; 1 Cor. xvi. 16.*

The institution of the church to be the teacher of religion, likewise implies an ability in those who are to be taught to comprehend the essential truths of religion. Much declamation has been expended upon the mysteriousness of revelation, the obscurities of Scripture, the arduousness of bringing articles of faith within the comprehension of uneducated minds, and the like; but the office of teaching would be useless if those to be instructed were incapable of learning all requisite truth. Hence all have capacity enough to avail themselves of teaching, which is supplied by the church either through her public formularies, or her regularly ordained ministers.

The teaching of the church is designed only as a *help* to the discovery of the true doctrine of the Bible. That is the great charter of her faith, and her privileges; and the instructions she is empowered to give, are not *independent* of the written word, but elucidatory of it. The Bible is the rule of faith by which the truth of any doctrine is to be tried; and all men of competent education are bound to make this trial; to examine, to prove or disprove by this divine standard the truth of the system of belief transmitted to them. To facilitate the performance of this duty the church offers her assistance; proposing

* See Barrow's admirable Sermons on "Obedience to our Spiritual Guides and Governors," in vol. iii. p. 269—308, of Works, fol.

her own exposition of the leading articles of Christianity only as a help to the knowledge of the Scriptures, of which she is the keeper and witness, and guiding them in their progress till they "all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Ephes. iv. 13.

Such is the nature of the church's prerogative of being the instructor in religion. The church teaches, Scripture proves. As she is invested with authority sufficient to help all in the acquisition of spiritual edification, all are bound to pay a reverent attention to her voice; and all, however ignorant, who attend to her instructions, may, through divine grace, be led to understand and embrace all necessary and saving truth.

The office here assigned to the church is not at all at variance with the free exercise of private judgment. There is a wide difference between an infallible authority, and no authority whatever. To the former, as has been shown, the church can have no just title; no power is given her by the Supreme Head to overrule the understanding; yet he has invested her with the privilege to inform and enlighten the mind; to propound, for the edification of her sons, what she conceives to be the true sense of Scripture; and to afford such necessary instruction as they may gladly avail themselves of, without departing from the right of inquiring and judging for themselves. The Bible alone is the foundation of her faith; and while she offers an assistance of inestimable value for learning the sacred truths, she bids them, after the example of the Bereans, to search the Scriptures, whether her doctrines are read therein, or may be proved thereby.

3. Besides the instructions of the church, whose duty it is to teach, the assistance of the Spirit is promised to all believers, not only to sanctify their hearts, but to enlighten their understandings. Not that we are to expect a degree of divine illumination approaching to inspired knowledge;

what is here contended for, is not irresistible, but co-operating grace; grace not to supersede the use of reason, and the teaching of the church, but to render them effective. The position is, that we cannot understand the Scriptures without the gracious aid of the Holy Spirit, to guide and direct us in the employment of those means which our Lord has prescribed for the acquirement of religious truth; and that this aid is given to all who ask it in prayer, and sincerity of faith.*

Herein is a broad line of separation from the mystic and enthusiast, both of whom fondly imagine an elapse of the Spirit, specially illuminating their minds, and guiding them into all saving truth; whereas, according to the doctrine just laid down, though the illumination of the Holy Spirit is admitted to be necessary, it is only so in conjunction with the other external means which Providence hath granted for our religious edification. As Daniel, though endued with a prophetic spirit, investigated diligently the predictions of Jeremiah, Dan. ix. 2; and as Timothy, in whom was "the gift of God," viz. the gifts and graces of the Spirit, is exhorted to "give attendance to *reading*," &c., 1 Tim. iv. 13, 14; 2 Tim. i. 6; so is every Christian bound to use his best exertions to ascertain the revealed will of God. There is no ground for believing that the assistance of the Spirit will be extended to those who neglect and despise the ordinary means of instruction; yet in addition the aid of divine grace is required, without which we can neither discern the true sense of Scripture, nor reap spiritual improvement from it.

In the sacred writings we find many and express promises, that the faithful shall be assisted in their endeavours after truth by divine assistance. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you," Matt. vii. 7. "If any man will do his

* See Homily on Scripture, Second Part; Fuller, Moderation of the church of England, chap. v. § 8; Hammond, on Divine Illumination, prefixed to his commentary.

will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God," John vii. 17. "They shall be all taught of God," vi. 47. "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth," viii. 31, 32. St. Paul prays, "that God may give to the Ephesians the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him; the eyes of their understanding being enlightened, that they might know," &c. Ephes. i. 17. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him," James i. 5. "Let us, as many as be perfect, be thus minded; and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you," Phil. iii. 15. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned," 1 Cor. ii. 14. "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost," xii. 3. "We are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord," 2 Cor. iii. 18. "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth," James i. 18. The Lord "opened the heart of Lydia, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul," Acts xvi. 14. God "will teach sinners in the way: the meek will he guide in judgment; and to the meek he will teach his way," Ps. xxv. 8, et seq.

From these, and many other passages which might be quoted, it is perfectly clear that heavenly aid will be communicated by the Holy Spirit. But it is replied, that the aid here spoken of is moral, not intellectual; its object being to remove the moral darkness of our nature, not to convey to our intellect the alone true meaning of a difficult passage of Scripture. And in confirmation it is urged, that such an illumination would be nothing less than granting the lofty prerogative of personal infallibility; for if God teaches the true meaning of a litigated passage, the interpretation thus suggested by the Holy Spirit must

be infallibly accurate, and to question its soundness would be absurd and impious.*

Unquestionably so; but the inference presupposes the plenary inspiration of the interpreter; whereas the promised illumination is only the ordinary assistance of the Spirit, extended to the understanding; and assistance that neither contradicts, nor supersedes, nor overrules the use of our natural faculties. We are constantly exhorted to employ them on the subject of revealed truth; while the Spirit assists and exalts, it leaves our reason free; and no more makes us infallible, than the ordinary influence of the Spirit upon the heart renders us impeccable. If, "after we have received the Holy Ghost, we may depart from grace given, and fall into sin, and by the grace of God we may rise again, and amend our lives," as our Articles express it; so, after we have received the enlightening assistance of the Spirit, the understanding may be led into error, and again, by the same assistance, may be guided into truth.

Hence we see the futility of the objection taken from the fact, that persons who, to all outward appearance, are living under the sanctifying influence of the Spirit, adopt, with equal sincerity and honesty, very different interpretations of the sacred writings. Divine grace is communicated in such measure as is compatible with free agency: it exercises no compulsory power over the understanding or the heart; and, therefore, cannot exempt men from the possibility of error, either moral or intellectual. As well might the failings of good men be alleged against the existence of spiritual sanctification, as the doctrinal errors of

* This, and the next objection, are powerfully urged by Mr. Faber, on Calvinism, l. i. c. 5. This excellent writer once entertained different and sounder views; for in his "Practical Treatise on the ordinary Operations of the Holy Spirit," 8vo. Lond. 1814, second edit., he says: "The office of the Holy Ghost is not to reveal any *additional* doctrines to us; but to enable us to *understand spiritually* those which have been already revealed," p. 47; and he contends throughout the chapter, that the "illumination of the understanding through the influence of the Holy Spirit, is the first work of grace in the human soul." Chap. ii.

equally good men against the reality of mental illumination from God.

After all, we are not to reject the doctrine, with whatever difficulties it may appear to short-sighted mortals to be surrounded. We must be content to receive it as it is plainly set forth in Scripture, which assures us, as a late eminent prelate expresses it, "that the inquirer after religious truth, cultivating his genuine disposition to know and to do the will of God, may well confide in that communication of heavenly aid, which, if duly sought for, will not fail to be bestowed as a blessing upon his endeavours, by Him who 'giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not.' For if the Almighty hath actually imparted his will to mankind, is it not with the intent that they should thankfully receive it, and diligently search its meaning? And can we doubt that every indication of such a disposition will be regarded with special favour by the great Author and Finisher of our faith? Can we doubt that the grace of God will assist in perfecting what the humble aspirant after truth is already striving to accomplish, by the use of those means which the Providence of God has placed within his reach? What farther satisfaction on this point can be requisite, than that assurance of our blessed Lord and Master, 'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.' "*"

Such are the instituted guides by whose helps every person possessed of common understanding may be able to attain a saving knowledge of the divine truths revealed by the Spirit in the Scriptures. The first of these, "the light of reason," as it is competent to discover the meaning of human communications through the medium of language; so is it able, when aided by the teaching of the church and of the Spirit, to extract the true meaning of the sacred oracles, by means of those grammatical and critical rules, which are applied to all other works written

* Van Mildert, Bampton Lect. ii. p. 47.

in the dialects of antiquity. Let the well-grounded scholar take the original of the New Testament, and he will find both the genuine text, and the true interpretation of by far the greatest part, established by testimony so convincing as to exclude any reasonable doubt.

The scholastic attainments required to produce this result are within the reach of comparatively few; and, of course, those who possess them not, or who have not leisure for such investigations, must rely upon the judgment and integrity of others. To such the church, by the constitution of her divine Founder, offers an adequate guidance. Through her instructions, brought home to the bosoms of men by her apostolic order of ministers, the most destitute of this world's learning have abundant means of satisfying their minds as to the divine origin of Christianity, and as to the peculiar doctrines it inculcates. In such cases much, no doubt, is taken upon credit; but all are obliged to do the same, to a greater or less extent.* If we examine the grounds of all belief, it will be found to rest upon testimony; and the only difference between the belief of the learned and the unlearned is, that the former inquire farther, and understand more of the evidence upon which it is built; but both are compelled, by the constitution of their minds, to assent to the testimony which, to whatever extent they may comprehend it, appears to their reason to be credible. The illiterate must depend in a greater degree upon the teaching of the church; but finding, by the exercise of their private judgment, that it in no way contradicts natural reason, that, on the contrary, it is supported by the general consent of the learned, and is confirmed by Scripture, so far as they understand it, they yield an entire and rational assent.

This conviction may be as strong and durable as that of the most deeply learned. Reasonable beings only require their reason to be satisfied; and whenever it is so, they have a rational belief; though different degrees of evidence may

* See ante, p. 104.

be requisite for this purpose to different capacities. The less educated will of course defer more to the church, inasmuch as they stand more in need of her assistance; and with her help they may attain a knowledge of Christianity unto salvation. Their acquiescence in the doctrine of the Church, thus brought about by the free use of their natural powers, is farther ratified and confirmed by the teaching of the Spirit, which "beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God," Rom. viii. 16. The most powerful minds, and the most extensively enriched with learning, stand in as much need as the humblest, of heavenly grace, without which all human efforts are powerless in that knowledge which maketh wise unto salvation. "Who is sufficient for these things?" 2 Cor. ii. 16. No one, without the illumination of the Spirit; and with it, every one; for "the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal," 1 Cor. xii. 7; it "helpeth our infirmities," Rom. viii. 26; "searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God," 1 Cor. ii. 10; giveth "the word of wisdom," xii. 8; teaches those things which "are spiritually discerned," 1 Cor. ii. 14; and thus "the eyes of our understanding being enlightened, we know what is the hope of our calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints," Ephes. i. 18.

By the instrumentality of these helps, which a kind Creator hath granted for our assistance and direction, every individual, of every rank and condition, may arrive at a moral conviction of the truth of his religion. Of no force, then, is the Romish line of argument—that the Bible alone cannot be the sole rule of faith; because it would impose upon every one the necessity of ascertaining for himself, that the Bible contains a revelation from God, that it has been faithfully preserved, and is rightly interpreted, before he can be assured of the truth of his religion; a task difficult for any, and impossible for the bulk of mankind.*

* By no one has this been argued with more point and eloquence than by Dr. Wiseman, in his *Introduct. Lect.*

But the Protestant rule of faith does *not* require a complete knowledge of ALL the grounds and evidences by which the Protestant belief is established. A much lower degree of it may serve to convince the judgment; and abundantly sufficient for this is imparted to all by the teaching of the church and of the Spirit. Protestantism requires the full conviction of the understanding, not a blind and unthinking assent; and, as liberty of private judgment is absolutely necessary for this purpose, it requires all to examine for themselves; in which, as we have seen, the most destitute of human learning have as sufficient means of rational conviction as the learned; a conviction to which an infallible judge could give no additional assurance.

Were the objection true, it would be nugatory; because it equally applies to the communion of the church of Rome, the members of which must undergo exactly the same process of inquiry, before they can be assured of the infallibility of their church, even supposing such assurance attainable; which is wholly beyond the ability of the great mass of the people. An objection equally applicable to both rules of faith, cannot be valid against either.

All men are thus furnished by a merciful Providence with the opportunity and the means of acquiring a saving knowledge of the Gospel. It is not for us to decide what compass of it is necessary in each individual. It may be, and probably is different, according to the varying conditions of men to whom the evangelical doctrine is addressed; some being required to know and believe more, some less; but the grant of a revelation implies, that all can attain to such a knowledge as is sufficient to direct them to heaven. God is not a stern tyrant, demanding from his creatures more than human ability can offer. He has given the Scriptures to be a light to our feet, they must consequently be sufficiently intelligible to all, whether learned or unlearned, to make them wise unto salvation; provided they in sincerity have recourse to the appointed means of in-

struction. All things in divine revelation are equally true; but may not be equally necessary to be known by all; yet all, it may be confidently affirmed, by the exercise of their own powers, assisted by the instruction of the church, and by the grace of the Holy Spirit, may attain so much knowledge of them as is required at their hands.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND RESPECTING TRADITION.

I. THE advocates of primitive tradition maintain that the church of England receives a double rule of faith, Scripture and Catholic Tradition; and that all who are ordained to minister within her pale pledge themselves to adhere to this fundamental principle of her constitution. "With her usual sober and modest judiciousness," says Mr. Faber, "she has always professed to build AUTHORITATIVELY indeed upon SCRIPTURE ALONE, but HERMENEUTICALLY upon SCRIPTURE AS UNDERSTOOD AND EXPLAINED BY PRIMITIVE ANTIQUITY. Herein she has judged well and wisely: SCRIPTURE and ANTIQUITY are the two pillars, upon which all rationally established faith must ultimately repose."*

The acceptance of a Rule of Faith, that is, a rule whereby to judge of all matters of faith, and by which all doctrines are to be tried, implies a belief of its *divine* authority; for no church builds its creed upon that which it regards only as *human*. With respect to the Scriptures there is no dispute; the sole question is, whether the church of

* On Calvinism, p. 12.

England regards primitive tradition as *apostolical*. She may respect it much, defer to it much; but unless it is shown that she actually holds its apostolicity, she cannot receive it as the authorized interpreter of the true faith, as one of the two pillars upon which "all rationally established faith must ultimately repose." Let us, then, examine the grounds alleged to justify a representation so much at variance with what is usually considered as the real character of the established church of this country.

In the statute of the first of Queen Elizabeth, relating to the high commission for restraining heretical pravity, it is enacted that nothing was to be determined to be heresy, but only such as had been adjudged to be so by the authority of the canonical Scripture, or by the first four general councils. But this act is at least virtually repealed by subsequent ones; and at any rate parliamentary enactment is not the deliberate decision of the church.

A more feasible evidence is furnished by certain canons passed by convocation in the years 1571, 1608, 1640; of which the first is most to the purpose: "*Imprimis vero videbunt, ne quid unquam doceant pro concione, quod a populo religiose teneri et credi velint, nisi quod consentaneum sit doctrinæ veteris aut novi Testamenti, quodque ex illa ipsa doctrina Catholici Patres et veteres episcopi collegerint.*"* The import of the last clause is not very apparent; but it can scarcely be as Bp. Jebb interprets it, "that not the text of Scripture alone, but also the doctrine deduced therefrom by the Catholic Fathers and ancient bishops, shall not be departed from, in any discourse delivered to the people for their guidance in religious belief and practice."† It expressly refers only to that doctrinal

* Sparrow's Collect. p. 237.

† Sermons, Append. p. 360. It seems to be understood in the same way by Laud, Confer. with Fisher; Bramhall, Works, p. 35; Patrick, Disc. of Trad. apud Gibson's Preservative; Brett, Use of Trad. § i.; Jer. Taylor, Works, vol. x. p. 131; Waterland, Works, vol. v. p. 317, who is puzzled to reconcile it with the fallibility of the Fathers, and the right of private judgment, by Newman, Proph. Office, p. 322, and others.

belief which "the Catholic Fathers and ancient bishops have collected from the doctrine" of the Bible; and consequently whatever authority may be thought to be here ascribed to them, it can only extend to them so far as they have deduced their doctrines from the Scriptures; which surely amounts to a declaration that the Scriptures are the sole test of truth; that nothing is to be held and believed, except what is consentaneous to them; and so excludes every thing else from the rule of faith.

Bishop Jebb refers to the preface to the Common Prayer, in which reference is made to "the godly and decent order of the ancient Fathers," and direction given "to search out by the ancient Fathers," &c. But this merely relates to the form of Common Prayers in the church, commonly called *Divine Service*, which can only be known by the testimony of the primitive ecclesiastical writers.

That the Anglican church requires the sanction of Catholic antiquity, is argued from the Nicene creed, which is said to have had its origin, not from Scripture, but from tradition; and also from the Athanasian creed, which does not say a word about Scripture, but rests its doctrines upon its being Catholic.* But these creeds, we are told in our 8th Article, are to be thoroughly received, because "they may be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture."

Some passages also in the Preface to the ordering of bishops and priests, have been produced; but the utmost they imply is, a respect for primitive antiquity; a respect to which no one denies it to be entitled. As to the royal commissions and proclamations, which some have appealed to, they cannot be allowed as expressing the judgment of the church.

II. These are the wholly inadequate grounds produced for the assertion, that the church of England builds her

* Keble, Serm. on Trad. p. 34.; Newman, Proph. Office, p. 327.

faith partly upon tradition. Among the evidences directly against it, the first place is due to our 6th Article; "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation," &c.

It may seem impossible to controvert an assertion so express, to the Scriptures being the sole foundation of faith; yet, some attempt to modify it, or rather mystify it, by alleging that it "is very plain and clear, except in one point, namely, who is to be the *judge* what is and what is not contained in Scripture. Our church is silent on this point—very emphatically so."* If this be the case, she virtually acknowledges it to be impossible to say to whom it belongs to distinguish between true and false, right and wrong in religion; and, consequently, controversy must be interminable; since, where there is no judge, there can be no decision;—an absurdity with which our venerable church cannot surely be charged.

But, "the church," Mr. Newman adds, "is not a *judge* of the sense of Scripture, in the common sense of the word, but a *witness*. If, indeed, the word judge be taken what it means in courts of law, one vested with authority to declare the received appointments and usages of the realm, and with power to enforce them, then the church is a judge,—but not of Scripture, but of tradition."† And what is tradition to which she is *witness*, and of which she is the *judge*? It is, as he explains it in the same page, "the fact, that such and such a doctrine, or such a sense of Scripture, has ever been received, and came from the Apostles." If this tradition is to determine the sense of Scripture, to judge of it is the same thing as to judge of the sense of Scripture. Nor is the case altered by alleging that she is only a witness; for she cannot bear witness to what is tradition, without judging and deciding what "has ever been received, and came from the Apostles;" which, as the sense of Scripture is involved, is in reality to judge of the sense of Scripture.

* Newman, *Proph. Office*, p. 319.

† *Ibid.* p. 320.

Mr. Newman acknowledges, in conformity with the 20th Article, "that the church has *authority*, and that individuals may judge for themselves outside the range of that authority."* Now the very notion of church authority implies a power to propound some interpretation of Scripture in articles of faith, and to enforce them as terms of church communion; which is in reality to judge "what is, and what is not contained in Scripture;" and thus, by declaring her own judgment, the church has authority in controversies of faith.

In the same manner the church of England exercises her power to judge of, and to declare, what she believes to be the true faith of the Gospel; yet without attempting to infringe the fundamental right of Christianity, and of human nature, to examine the matters proposed for our assent. She embodies, in public formularies, what she takes to be doctrinal truth; but, by rejecting every thing of a compulsory nature in religion, and by declaring that nothing is to be believed, except what can be proved by the word of God, she acknowledges liberty of conscience, and the right of free inquiry. Though it is not expressly said "who is to be the judge of Scripture truth," yet she exercises and declares her own judgment in disputed points; and also recognises the right of private judgment in those of her communion.†

In the 6th Article, we have her recorded judgment respecting the foundation of our faith. It does not say, "Holy Scripture, as understood and explained by primitive antiquity, containeth all things necessary to salvation, so that, whatsoever is not proved by Scripture and tradition, is not to be required of any man," &c.; but expressly, that Scripture alone containeth, &c. The Apocryphal books, and every thing except the written word of God, is excluded from her rule of faith; which written word, therefore, she alone regards as *divine*; so that "whatsoever is

* Newman, *Proph. Office*, p. 320.

† See Fuller, *Moderation of the Ch. of Engl. ch. iv—vi.*

not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation." Words cannot more clearly set forth the entire sufficiency of Scripture alone for faith and salvation.

In entire agreement with the *sixth*, several other Articles assert the Scriptures to be the only foundation of faith, as Articles, viii. xvii. xix. xx. xxi. xxii. xxiv. xxviii. xxxiv. The fact is too evident to be denied; it is, therefore, perfectly unnecessary to cite them at length.

Our Liturgy is professedly founded on the Word of God; for in the Preface "concerning the service of the church," it declares that "nothing is ordained to be read, but the very pure Word of God, the Holy Scriptures, or that which is agreeable to the same." The Old Testament is appointed to be read once, and the New Testament three times every year, besides the epistles and Gospels, except the Apocalypse; and the Psalms are to be read through once every month; "intending thereby that the clergy, and especially such as were ministers in the congregation, should (by often reading and meditation in God's word) be stirred up to godliness themselves, and be more able to exhort others by wholesome doctrine, and to confute them that were adversaries to the truth; and further that the people (by daily hearing of Holy Scripture read in the church) might continually profit more and more in the knowledge of God, and be the more inflamed with the love of his true religion." In the "Ordering of bishops and priests," it is asked, "Be you persuaded that the Holy Scriptures contain sufficiently all doctrine required of necessity for eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ?" And, are you determined "to teach nothing (as required of necessity to eternal salvation) but that you shall be persuaded may be concluded and proved by the Scriptures?"

In the book of Homilies all are exhorted to "reverently hear and read the Holy Scripture, which is the good of

the soul.”* Appeal is invariably made to it as the infallible standard of faith and manners; and it is expressly declared in the beginning of the Homily just cited, that “there is no truth nor doctrine necessary for our justification and everlasting salvation, but that is, or may be, drawn out of that fountain and well of truth.” It is asserted that “the Scriptures are God’s treasure-house, wherein are found all things needful for us to see, to hear, to learn, and to believe, necessary for the attaining of eternal life.”† The whole collection of Homilies, especially the two from which these extracts are taken, is so full to the same purpose, that further comment is superfluous.

To this must be added, that in none of our ecclesiastical formularies do we find any thing favouring the authority of tradition. With the exception of the 34th Article, which limits tradition to the matters of rites and ceremonies, they are entirely silent as to any such authority; which would be most unaccountable, if our church had regarded it as the authoritative teacher of the Christian doctrine. On the other hand, they reprobate it with a just severity. The principle upon which our Liturgy was composed is, as stated in the preface, to leave out all “uncertain stories and legends,” and all those things “whereof some are untrue, some uncertain, some vain and superstitious;” and to adhere to “the very pure word of God;” and, by so doing, to render the Liturgy more conformable to “the godly and decent order of the ancient Fathers.” In a still more pointed manner do the Homilies condemn tradition as the ground of faith.‡

The church of England, it is therefore evident, holds the Scriptures to be the only Rule of Faith. This is her primary and fundamental principle. But, next to the testimony of the Spirit of God, she venerates the judgment of the Catholic church, as the institution of Christ, and fa-

* First Homily, p. i.

† Second Book, Homily, x. p. i.

‡ Comp. Homily i. P. i.; Of Good Works, P. i., P. ii., P. iii.; Against the Peril of Idolatry, P. ii. towards the end.

voured with his continued support. That she entertains a reverential respect for pious antiquity, is evinced by the formation of the Liturgy from the ancient forms of prayer, and by the adaptation of her rites, ceremonies and form of ecclesiastical government to the model of the primitive church. Of this a formal intimation is made in the preface concerning the Service of the Church, and in the preface to the Ordination Service. In the Canons great deference is paid to the testimony and practice of the ancient Fathers.* In the Homilies the ancient Doctors and godly Fathers are often cited by way of illustration, agreeably to what is declared in the second part of the Homily against the Peril of Idolatry: "Although our Saviour Christ taketh not or needeth not any testimony of man, and that which is once confirmed by the certainty of his eternal truth hath no more need of the confirmation of man's doctrine and writings, than the bright sun at noon-tide hath need of the light of a little candle to put away darkness, and to increase his light," yet appeal is made, as confirmatory evidence of the true exposition, to what "was believed and taught of the old holy Fathers, and most ancient learned doctors, and received in the old primitive church, which was most uncorrupt and pure."

The judgment of the Anglican church, then, perfectly accords with our conclusion, in the preceding chapter, respecting the legitimate use and authority of tradition. She pays the profoundest respect to the declared voice of the primitive Catholic church, as a help for interpreting the Scriptures, and judging of the Christian doctrines; but it is a respect far subordinate to that which she pays to the written Word of God; since she admits the authority of Christian antiquity merely as a help and guide to, and a confirmation of, her own interpretation of the Scriptures, which Scriptures she regards, and rightly regards, as the only *divine* source and standard of religious truth.

* See Fuller, *Moderat. of the Church of England*, chap. v. § 3.

While adhering to the written Word of God as the Rule of Faith, the church of England does not admit any church, any traditionary doctrine, or any power on earth, to be the recognised judge of its true sense. She repudiates all coercion, all attempts to extend a spiritual tyranny over the minds of men; she addresses them as rational beings, offering her invaluable assistance to inform the understanding, and to lead her members to a saving knowledge of the truth; at the same time inviting them to judge for themselves; and though she justly condemns the rash licentious, and inconsiderate exercise of private judgment, she acknowledges it to be the unalienable right of every Christian. By virtue of this right, she propounds for the instruction and guidance of all her own interpretation of Scripture; and proposes it as the condition of communion with her; leaving it to individual judgment to approve or condemn, to accept or reject it. While preserving and teaching what in her belief is genuine, unadulterated Christianity, she does not encroach upon natural liberty by laying any interdict upon the exercise of the understanding; and though she aids and assists in imparting to it a saving faith, she extends a willing toleration to all who cannot yield a conscientious assent to her doctrine and discipline.

THE END.

